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# The

# Literary

# Review

**Angoff: Stories, Poems, Essay**

**Eluard: Poem That Can't Be Stopped**

**A Pasternak Letter**

**Dahlberg: Moby-Dick — A Reappraisal**

**Whitman: An Unpublished Essay**

QUARTERLY / ONE DOLLAR / AUTUMN 1960

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## Editorial Notes

Since Charles Angoff is featured, at my suggestion, in this number of *The Literary Review*, he has withdrawn from sharing in its editing. The writing of these Editorial Notes thus becomes my sole responsibility. It is an assignment I welcome since it provides me with the opportunity to say a few personal words about my colleague and co-editor.

Although I felt I knew Mr. Angoff through his writing and editing as early as the twenties, I did not actually meet him until the summer of 1949 when he came to the University of Kansas City, then under my presidency, to participate in the first of a series of Writers' Conferences. These Conferences, directed by Gorham Munson, attracted many well-known writers, editors and critics, among them John Ciardi, Martha Foley, Horton Foote, Thomas Hornsby Ferrell, Vincent McHugh, Stephen Spender, Allen Tate . . . Several years later, in a book of memoirs, my wife and I recalled one of the many exciting sessions these Conferences generated:

One memorable June evening all the members of the Writers' Conference gathered in the Playhouse patio, cooled by north breezes, to listen to Charles Angoff talk about his many years as a literary man, and particularly of his long association with H. L. Mencken, first on the old *Smart Set* and later on the *Mercury*. It was the history of a literary movement, of which Mencken was the genius and the spur. "Mencken was his own worst enemy," Angoff said. "He made fun of America, of democracy, of women—of all the things he really loved. Yet he was passionately American—he carried on a continuous love affair with the forty-eight states! Mencken said, 'People aren't interested in the Episcopal Church, so let's write articles about "How to Bum a Meal" or "How to Rob a Bank".' He debunked everything stodgy, especially pompous politicians. He

took their guilt for granted until they proved themselves innocent."

Angoff described Mencken's unerring scent of potential writing genius. The day the story, "Death in the Woods," hit Mencken's desk, no one had ever heard of the author, but Mencken, sensing his find, threw his hat into the air, exclaiming, "Let's go celebrate!" The unknown author was Sherwood Anderson. The same ritual was repeated when Somerset Maugham's story, "Sadie Thompson," later the stage success, *Rain*, came over his desk.

Of his long-time friend and associate, Angoff spoke simply, affectionately. We who listened will remember that evening with gratitude, and hope that Angoff will some day do the definitive Mencken biography.

Mr. Angoff did do the Mencken biography. It was a controversial book, but now that the tumult has died (with sales still very much alive), even those relatively few reviewers who were shocked by what seemed to them lack of filial respect for the Sage of Baltimore have now come to recognize this book, not only as a penetrating portrait of Mencken, but also as a brilliant panorama of one of the most creative and productive periods in American culture.

In their appraisals, Mr. Yoseloff and Mr. Ribalow stress Mr. Angoff's importance as a chronicler of the Jewish community in the United States. I would extend this undoubtedly significant role to include Mr. Angoff's distinction as a cultural historian over and beyond any specific group—a distinction that places him among the best of our country's writers in the field of *belles lettres*. I suspect that this distinction will be fully realized only by later generations who seek to understand the *Zeitgeist* of the twentieth century.

(continue inside back cover)



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## Contributors

CHARLES ANGOFF: see Editorial Notes and the appraisals by Thomas Yoseloff and Harold U. Ribalow.

UPENDRA NATH ASHK, Allahabad, India, published his first story in 1926 and has been writing continuously over the years: five novels, seven short story collections, six one-act play collections, ten full-length plays, three books of poetry, two volumes of essays. Seventy of his stories were recently published in India in one volume.

ETHAN AYER, Hamilton, Massachusetts, has published, in addition to poetry, a novel and a play. His first published story, "The Unicorn," appeared in this *Review*.

OSCAR BERGER has been called "the greatest living caricaturist of world celebrities." His sketches have appeared in leading newspapers and magazines and have been syndicated, televised and shown in museums throughout the world. His books include *Aesop's Fables*, *Famous Faces*, *My Victims* and *I Love You* (Harper, 1960), the last a delightful selection of poetry he compiled and decorated.

EARLE BIRNEY, Vancouver, Canada, has published five volumes of poetry and two novels and edited an anthology, *Twentieth Century Canadian Poetry*. His *Selected Poems* will be published in 1961 simultaneously in Toronto, New York and London.

EDWARD DAHLBERG—novelist, poet, critic—is compiling a volume of epistolary essays by Sir Herbert Read and himself for Spring publication (Horizon). *Can these Bones Live* (1941) will be republished this Fall (New Directions), with forty new

# The Literary Review

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drawings by James Kearns. Allen Tate has hailed this book as "a work of literature of the highest order, such as all criticism must be if it is to survive its time." John Chamberlain, reviewing *The Flea of Sodom* (1950), described Mr. Dahlberg as "an embattled man, fighting a glorious one-man fight for qualities that have all but disappeared from contemporary literature . . . He is a gadfly to the comfortable, the well-ensconced, the respectable and those who are . . . 'glitteringly unoriginal'."

PAUL ELUARD (1895-1952), one of the most gifted socially-conscious lyric poets, is regarded by many as the ablest representative of French Surrealism. During World War II, as one of the "Resistance Poets," he became a national figure. "The Poem That Can't Be Stopped" (*Poésie Ininterrompue*, 1946) is his longest and most important poem. In it, his friend Aragon wrote, "the highest expression of life is not the *idea* of love nor the unilateral expression of desire, no longer the single lover—but the pair." Lowenfels' adaptation is published with the permission of Eluard's American publisher, New Directions, and his translator, Lloyd Alexander.

K. SHAHID HOSAIN (1934- ), Pakistani poet, is an executive in Karachi where he spends his time "attempting to reconcile a cruel dichotomy—the dictates of my creative impulse and the role imposed on me as an organization man."

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twenty-six books.

JAMES KEARNS, brilliant young American artist, is represented in private and permanent collections, the latter including the Museum of Modern Art and the Whitney Museum of American Art, New York City.

WALTER LOWENFELS, a contemporary of Hart Crane, Kay Boyle and E. E. Cummings, is a legendary figure in letters. He has published many books of poetry and prose and a play. His early works, characterized by Kenneth Rexroth as "epoch-making," are today collectors' items. "The Poem That Can't Be Stopped" will be included in his book, *Some Deaths* (Jargon Press, 1961). *Walt Whitman's Civil War*, which he compiled and edited, is scheduled for Fall, 1960 (Knopf).

HAROLD U. RIBALOW, author or editor of ten books, including three collections of Jewish short stories, contributes to many magazines and newspapers both here and abroad.

CARL SANDBURG is the distinguished American writer.

KRISHNA BALDEV VAID, born in West Punjab (now part of Pakistan), is a Rockefeller Foundation scholar at Harvard, where he is working on his doctorate and writing his second novel. His short stories have appeared in *New World Writing*, *Bothege Oscure*, and elsewhere.

PETER VIERECK, professor of history, Mount Holyoke College, is the well-known poet, critic and translator. His scholarly historical book, *Roots of the Nazi Mind*, will appear as a paperback in 1961 (Putnam).

THOMAS YOSELOFF—author, editor and publisher—is the President of the publishing house that bears his name.

# THE LITERARY REVIEW

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NUMBER 1

The Guitar, <i>a poem</i>	Carl Sandburg	4
Carl Sandburg, <i>a sketch drawn from life</i>	Oscar Berger	4
Charles Angoff		5-48
The Tone of the Twenties, <i>an essay</i> (5); Azriel and Yolanda (16), The Cultured One (24), <i>two stories</i> ; Poems (32-35); Sketch drawn from life by Oscar Berger (36); The Importance of Charles Angoff, <i>two appraisals</i> , by Thomas Yoseloff (37) and Harold U. Ribalow (45).		
Criticism, <i>a holograph essay</i>	Walt Whitman	49
A Letter, <i>holograph</i>	Boris Pasternak	60
Gods and Niblicks, <i>a scene from a play</i>	Peter Viereck	63
The Rickshaw-Puller, <i>a story</i>	Upendra Nath Ashk	70
Misery, <i>a story</i>	Krishna Baldev Vaid	78
A Year of Sowing, <i>a poem</i>	Ethan Ayer	82
Sorrow for a Midget, <i>a story</i>	Langston Hughes	83
Moby-Dick—A Reappraisal	Edward Dahlberg	87
Dahlberg, Melville, <i>two drawings</i>	James Kearns	116-117
Montreal, North of Superior, <i>two poems</i>	Earle Birney	119
The Poem That Can't Be Stopped, <i>a poem</i>	Paul Eluard	123
Adapted from the French by Walter Lowenfels		
Lines for an Early Mentor, <i>a poem</i>	K. Shahid Hosain	144



CARL SANDBURG,  
drawn from life,  
by Oscar Berger

## The Guitar

(For Andrés Segovia)

CARL SANDBURG

A chattel with a soul—a personal possession  
often owning its possessor—being quaint and  
quiet, dedicated to the dulcet rather than  
the diapason—

Convex and concave this box of wood and strings  
under segoviac fingers gives out with little  
white birds flying easy sudden blue prayers  
serene maroon contemplations chasms where  
chords are lassoed and thrown into baskets  
shrines moved from corner to corner brass can-  
dlesticks taken out of light into shadow and  
back to shadow flame dancers in scarlet capes  
games where numbers remember each other's  
names acrobats turning triple somersaults  
amid tumbling multiplication tables evening  
winds of hushed purple in slow travel down a  
long brown valley where five yellow pigeons  
flying toward the sunset find themselves under  
the guidance of night stars

A portable companion always ready to go where  
you go—a small friend weighing less than a  
freshborn infant—to be shared with few or  
many—just two of you in sweet meditation

© by Carl Sandburg.

# The Tone of the Twenties

CHARLES ANGOFF

I HAVE had occasion recently to spend some time in the neighborhood of the Algonquin Hotel and the Royalton Hotel on West Forty-Fourth Street in New York City, and my heart was heavy as the memories tumbled one over another. I walked into the Algonquin lobby, looked into the room, well within hailing distance of the bar, where Alexander Woollcott and F. P. A. and George Kaufman and Wolcott Gibbs and Heywood Broun and so many others used to meet and play cards and talk and drink for hours unending . . . and the talk was, as Johannes Brahms would have said, unbuttoned . . . it was about books and ideas and women and about love and "the soft sorrow" (a phrase I heard F. P. A. use) that announces love's arrival, hovers over its mysteries, and follows it as it glides into the arms of the past.

And I came back to the central lobby where, a few weeks before his death, George Jean Nathan, at a little table, gave what was probably his farewell to life and, at the same time, a benediction to a whole era in American history. . . . Earlier we had gone to one of his favorite restaurants on West Forty-Fourth, the Blue Ribbon, then to sit on a bench in Bryant Park, behind the Central Library. He said, "I love this city. Don't let anybody tell you that America is more than New York City. It isn't. Whatever sense and decency the hinterland has—and all America west of the Hudson is hinterland—it gets from New York City. New York City is the capital of the Twentieth Century. Mencken called New York Babylon and a mess of chicken coops unfit for civilized living. That was the small town man in him talking. That's what kept him from being what he might have been. Anyway, Angoff, remember this. The only things that grow in the deserts and backwoods are religions. Civilization grows in the cities." He stopped, smiled, then added, "I was going to let you think this is my idea. I read it somewhere. It's a little hard to lie to you at my time of life."

He suggested we go to the Algonquin for a nightcap. People walked in and out, looked at both of us, and continued on their way. I sensed that they made him feel lonely. He said: "These people who live here now, who drink here now, are merchants, scavengers, they live from aspirin to aspirin, they have to get drunk to make love. Think of it! The era that blossomed here was alive with silver bells, little ones and somewhat bigger ones, and there were magic lanterns and there were girls and there was the night. The wondrous lovely madness of the night went out of American life with the Twenties. You're a lucky man you got a taste of it. I was luckier. I got more . . ."

I walked into the lobby of the Royalton where Nathan died not long after, and sat down and waited for Nathan to come down from his apartment to meet me, as he had so often done, but he did not come down and I couldn't believe that he never would . . . And I noticed that the old charm of the Royalton—it had been quiet and gentle and soft when I had first entered it more than three decades before—had also gone, long before Nathan himself went, as a matter of fact . . . and my mind glided back in memory and my heart grew heavier and heavier . . . It was here that I had seen Robert Benchley and Jim Tully and F. Scott Fitzgerald (in his last sorrowful days, when he looked like an elderly college boy back from a night of heavy-drinking and other forms of merry-making) . . . and it was here that I had often seen and spoken to Ernest Boyd, now virtually forgotten, but a man of fantastic erudition in literary history . . . and James Thurber and Harold Ross and Dorothy Parker and James M. Cain and Carl Sandburg and Theodore Dreiser and Sherwood Anderson . . .

The Royalton and the Algonquin formed the axis of most that was wonderful in the Twenties. They were the twin capitals of that era, more important by far than Washington or Wall Street or Chicago or San Francisco. It was from them that the pronouncements of the decade issued, and not by way of ukases or bulls, but in whispers and chuckles and smiles and silences . . .

Was it all a happy and gay time? It was not. Times of vital, leaping imagination are not times of unalloyed happiness. No



happiness is ever unalloyed. The sense of fleeting time and the apparent purposelessness of the entire scheme of things surround all calm and all joy with an inaudible sigh. This seems to be the divine plan.

But it was a time of dominant concern for yearnings, for dreams, for things not seen, for things hoped for, and this is what stamped it. It was a time that lived by the call of the heart, it was a time that was suspicious of the arrogant claims of the mind.

Certain people and certain events stand out in the memory. In the lower forties there used to be a basement bar-restaurant called various names in order to elude new policemen on the beat and Prohibition agents who were overly inquisitive. It was dark, lush, plush, and the food and drink were wonderful. Bankers, Broadway producers and business men often took their new girls there for the first time to make an impression. Its names were on the order of The Seven Sins, Royal Flush, Left Bank, Right Bank, Virtue Triumphant, Inc. I was there once in the small hours of the morning. Nathan had taken me along. We went to a huge table where there were a dozen men and women assembled. As the night wore on about a dozen more people joined us.

For some three hours Robert Benchley held forth. He looked so young, so boyish, so happy, so full of words, so eager to talk . . . and as he talked one or another of the girls would come over and kiss him, and after each such kiss he would say, "The accolade of the angels, my love!"

What did he talk about? After more than thirty years I do not remember the details, but its aroma, its direction, its timbre, its contour linger with me. Toward the end (it must have been almost five in the morning) he and Nathan debated on the relative merits of the night and evening, Nathan championing the supremacy of the night, Benchley pushing the claims of the evening.

"I will say this for George Jean Nathan of the great State of Indiana and of Cornell University, a well-known fencing academy," said Benchley, "I will say this, he uses the right similes and antonyms and the subjunctive. It is impossible to talk about eternal things without bringing in women. Now George says the essence of woman is night, and hence night wins. I am not one to gainsay the many

virtues of night. Where, indeed, would we all be without the night? But, and I wish you would all listen to me, it's the memory of a woman at eventide that you kiss at night. Twilight, my friends, that's what makes all the difference between the ordinary world and God's world, between barbarism and civilization, between man and woman."

A woman who was sitting next to me, said, "He should have been a poet or a musician. He's too good to be a humorist or a dramatic critic."

There was another time, when a publisher's editor took me to a party given, I believe, by Lewis Gannett, former book reviewer for the *New York Herald Tribune*. In one corner a group was arguing about Marcel Proust: whether he was a novelist or a prose poet, or a writer at all, and how he compared with Anatole France. In another corner a woman was reciting Emily Dickinson's poems by the dozen. Then there was a group in the middle of which a huge man was holding forth with great animation, and right in front of him, looking up at him, in a kindly, bewildered aura of admiration, was a shorter man. I approached this group, fascinated by the bulk of the man in the center; in fact, I was so fascinated that I didn't even hear what he was saying. He had a head like a squash and his eyes bulged, yet there was something tender in his face and in his talk. I asked who the man was, and was told that he was Diego Rivera. I was not an admirer of his work, though I appreciated its power. In painting and sculpture, as in poetry, I am more attracted by the lyrical than the dramatic.

Then somebody told me the shorter man facing Diego Rivera was Sherwood Anderson. My heart leaped at the name, for I thought then (and still do) that he was one of the supreme literary artists of the English language in the past one hundred years, a man who in range, intensity, and genuine creativity is on a plane with Chekhov, De Maupassant, and Thomas Hardy. I followed Anderson around the room as unobtrusively as possible. I was pleased with him. He looked just as I wanted him to look, serene, bedazzled by all the talk and commotion, present yet far away, the very personification of total unconcern with what the world calls practical things. He spoke very little. All I remember his saying that night is "I would like to be on a boat now."



That one line, in some mystical way, defines Anderson and also stamps the era. All America wanted to be on a boat . . . all America sensed there was more solidity on the ocean than on the bedrock of its cities. America wanted to flee from the products of its sciences, even as Anderson did flee from his office as he entered into middle age. This yearning for the joyous madness of the unfettered heart reaching for warm oblivion or infinity was the key of being in these years. The key was sounded in New York and its echoes reached every soul across the land, adding a glow to every woman's face and inches to every man's stature.

It was a time of plentitude in the arts, because the heart of America was plenteous. There were three times as many theatres as now, and the whole theatrical world was off-Broadway . . . experimentation everywhere side by side with old gold. There were theatres in the bowels of the Bowery. There were theatres east and west of Broadway extending into the sixties, and there were theatres in Washington Heights—and Forty-Second Street, between Times Square and Eighth Avenue and even extending half a block to Ninth Avenue, was an avenue of enchantment. Presiding over all the theatres was the Amsterdam, long the home of the "Follies" and for long the temple where young men, whole generations of them, lost their hearts to Adèle Astair and Marilyn Miller.

A word about the "Follies" and the "Scandals" and the "New Faces" and the "Gaieties." Weren't they sheer fluff? Of course they were. And that was their glory. At their best they were a reflection of what was happening in the heart of America. America had found herself on a national scale as Walt Whitman had found himself three quarters of a century before. Whitman had been a prophet:

"One's self I sing, a simple separate, person,  
Yet utter the word Democratic, the word En Masse.  
Of physiology from top to toe I sing, . . ."

How Whitman would have loved and sung and loved again and sung again the Twenties!

"I hear America singing, the varied carols I hear,  
Those of mechanics, each one singing as it  
should be blithe and strong. . . ."

But was it only New York that was singing? It was not. New York was only leading the chorus. The melodies of the "Gaieties" and "Vanities" and "Follies" were soon heard around the land, and in every home, in every hall, in every bar, in the parks and on the hills and in the valleys: "Clap Yo' Hands," "Strike Up The Band," "'S Wonderful," "Oh, Lady, Be Good!" "That Certain Feeling" . . .

The musicals and the popular tunes were of a quality that echoed the tenderness in the people and the wondrous common humanity in those more blessed with knowledge and conscious perception. But these latter more blessed men and women had special reasons for rejoicing—and the special reasons were good for the whole nation, for taste and manners and attitudes and inner delights do spread and do seep into the farthestmost nooks and into the apparently most unlikely folk. What comes out of silver bells is heard round the world.

And what mighty and heroic and heart-invested days those were for those who look to the drama and music for guidance as well as comfort. Eugene O'Neill came into his own in that decade. Broadway, and hence America, at long last accepted him, seeing him for the monumental creator he was. When *Desire Under the Elms* and *Beyond the Horizon* finally reached Times Square, America came of age in the art of dramatic writing. And when *Strange Interlude* and *Mourning Becomes Electra* followed it, the American theatre joined the stream of world dramatic history. And it was the same decade in which other playwrights, notably Maxwell Anderson, did their finest work. Let us not forget that the early Anderson was a poet, a minor O'Neill, but a minor O'Neill is also wonderful, as *What Price Glory?* and *Saturday's Children* are also fine and enduring dramatic poems to two great events in American history: World War I and the moral, spiritual upheaval that followed it.

Music? Had America ever before been so rich in musical organizations, in opportunities for all people to enjoy great music as in the Twenties? For some mysterious reason our composers have not yet come forth with compositions of the stature of those of Melville and Whitman and Hawthorne and Emily Dickinson and Willa Cather in literature. But there is now a receptive public for great

music, and when there is such an audience great works cannot be far behind. The history of culture attests to that.

I can personally attest to the maturation of the audience, for my own maturity largely came about in the Twenties. For years the Boston Symphony Orchestra, under the proud, austere, and almost Prussian direction of Karl Muck, was pretty much the private pleasure of the Back Bay élite. But after the First World War something happened in the Boston musical world, as it happened in every other area of Boston culture—all American culture. If America and its Allies had not been overly successful in making the world safe for democracy, America did manage, through the inscrutable workings of historical forces, to democratize its major institutions of culture. It is one of the curiosities of American history that it achieved political democracy long before it achieved true, widespread cultural democracy. Andrew Jackson came almost two hundred years before Stephen Crane, and Harvard had been in existence for almost two centuries before the state universities became full-fledged bodies of higher learning.

But back to music. My mother once took me to hear Karl Muck play Brahms' *First Symphony*, and the feat was the talk of the Boston Ghetto. Suddenly, almost as if overnight, as the Twenties came into being, many of my friends had season tickets (or pooled their resources for one or two season tickets to be shared by several) for the Boston Symphony Orchestra. And soon there were several smaller symphonies that came and went.

New York now has one major orchestra, the Philharmonic, but in the Twenties it had several more, among them the New York Symphony, whose chief conductor was the late Walter Damrosch, and the Beethoven Symphony. It was Walter Damrosch who introduced Gershwin's *Concerto in F* and it was Fritz Busch who was on the podium when the eight (or was it ten?)-year-old Yehudi Menuhin made his New York début as soloist in Beethoven's *Violin Concerto*.

The Metropolitan Opera House had an institution in the Twenties, the Sunday Night Gala Concert, which I attended regularly. I used to sit in one of the last rows in the topmost balcony, and I paid fifty cents for my seat. I met there pretty much the same people

Sunday after Sunday. They were of all ages, of various races and religions. They came from Manhattan and Brooklyn and the Bronx, others came from Newark and Philadelphia, and there were individuals and couples from all over the United States who had come to New York for a visit. We all had in common two things: we were deficient in financial resources and we loved music. The administrators of the august Metropolitan Opera Company had learned about us and apparently had decided that there wasn't too much loss in our "trade." But I think there was another reason why the Metropolitan was good to us. It heard America singing, and it wanted to join the chorus, so to speak. It became just as smart, as the phrase goes, to lose money on the common people as to lose it on the carriage trade.

And what did we hear at the Sunday Gala Concerts? What glorious vocal music and what glorious instrumental music. We heard Giovanni Martinelli and Tito Schipa and Antonio Scotti and Edward Johnson and Lawrence Tibbett, and we heard Elizabeth Rethberg and Sigrid Onegin and Lucrezia Bori and Lily Pons and Frances Alda . . . we heard arias from *Aïda* and *The Magic Flute* and *La Bohème* and *Carmen* and *La Traviata* and *Boris Godunov* and *Il Trovatore* and *Louise* and *Parsifal* and *Der Rosenkavalier* and many of the other golden treasures . . . and we heard *lieder* . . . and the memory of Sigrid Onegin singing Schubert's "Der Erlkönig" and *Die Winter Reise* will always be with me . . . She sang them like an angel sorrowing for the evanescence of the loveliness of this world . . . and I saw a young couple holding hands and moved to tears by the otherworldly wonderment of what they were hearing, and this, too, will always be with me . . . and as we all walked slowly down the hundreds of stairs to Broadway, we were silent, for we all felt a little closer to the divinity that shaped us.

There was so much else. But one more aspect must be mentioned: the vitality in the newspaper, magazine and book worlds. New York City had three times as many newspapers as it has now, and what papers some of them were. *The Morning World* of blessed memory was like no other paper in all American journalistic history. It generally printed the news in succinct form, but in the case of subjects that interested it, it went to enormous lengths. Its investiga-

tion of the Ku Klux Klan remains one of the masterpieces of American journalism. Then there was its editorial page. It was not written in the "however, nevertheless" spirit. One could never find in it a paragraph congratulating some dull politician or preacher for having reached the age of eighty and thus beaten the calendar. The page was alive with imagination, with courage, and with good writing—often brilliant writing. And the cartoons by Rollin Kirby were *sui generis*. Kirby, as a cartoonist, was probably our nearest approach to Daumier. His portrayal of Mr. Prohibition—a tall, lanky, sleazy, lascivious-lipped man trudging an umbrella—is already a part of our body of national symbols.

But it was the Page Opposite the Editorial that stamped the *World*, that reflected the Twenties, that set a standard for American creative daily journalism, that gave the newspaper men the country over something to dream about with respect to their own papers. There was The Conning Tower, a column conducted by the recently departed F. P. A. (Franklin P. Adams)—a column of lovely and stinging light verse, of pleasant or sharp comment upon the passing scene, of crusades for minor civic improvements (such as the more prominent display of street numbers on homes), of factual corrections of speeches by pompous statesmen. Everything was put down *con amore*, with good humor. There was no indignation, no malice. The spirit of the boulevard, of the drawing room, of the literary coffee shop hovered over it.

And the same civilized note was in the music criticism, first by Deems Taylor and then by Samuel Chotzinoff, and in the book reviews by Laurence Stallings, and of course in "It Seems To Me," a daily column of brief essays and remarks about everything at all, conducted by Heywood Broun before he became an amateur radical.

This was the *Morning World*, and this was the *Evening World* . . . and equally wonderful in their own ways were the *New York Evening Post*, which must never be confused with the embarrassing thing it is now, and the *New York Sun*. Along with the monumental *Times*, they set the pace for the newspapers west, north, and south of the Hudson.

A final word about magazine and book publishers. With many of our current mass circulation magazines (as with *Life*, for exam-



ple) it is not always easy to differentiate between the advertisements and the editorial matter. And there are only two monthlies that pretend to offer any interpretation of the news—and they are more monthly newspapers than magazines. What could one read in the Twenties, where could a beginning writer or a veteran writer send his stories and essays and poems? Was he often bewildered as he is now? He had a choice, and what a choice: *Scribner's*, *The Forum*, the *Century*, the *Dial*, *World's Work*, *Review of Reviews*, the old *American Mercury*, *McNaught's Monthly*, *Plain Talk*, the *North American Review*, the old *Atlantic*, the old *Harper's*, and outside of New York there were the "little" magazines which were then in their glory: the old *Prairie Schooner*, the *Midland*, the *Double Dealer*—but why go on? You can get the names in any history of American magazines.

As for book publishing, the tendency now is for publishers to combine, as newspapers are combining, with the resulting organization often being a plant without a soul, a post-office, a paper factory, where, alas, manuscripts are frequently accepted by the vote of salesmen, not by the enthusiastic choice of an editor to whom publishing is an adventure in ideas and in literary imagination, who spends his evenings at home looking for pearls of great price in the accumulated manuscripts, who would be offended if he were invited to become a panel member of an "intellectual" TV or radio show helping to sell some deodorant or laxative. The Twenties were the days of those wonderful pioneers of culture, small publishers. Alfred A. Knopf was one such publisher then, Covici-Friede was another, Horace Liveright a third and there were a dozen others who would rather print the first book of Edna St. Vincent Millay and Sinclair Lewis than all the volumes by Robert Chambers and Kathleen Norris. It is these little publishers who helped carry the flag of American literary culture further North.

Books and music and the theatre were not merely parts of one's life: they transfused the whole of one's life. It became fashionable to talk about philosophy and Humanism in Literature and about Toscanini's interpretation of Beethoven's *Seventh* as contrasted with Mengelberg's, and about the "real" meaning of Joyce's *Ulysses*. While it is true that not all were privy to the complexities involved,

it is also true that the interest of so many people in such matters indicated something that was wonderful. America had become one huge Bohemia—singing and dancing and yearning and feeling totally unfettered and eager to give expression to this glorious carefreeness that one could sense in the faces, in the very gait, of people.

And there was another meaning to this wonderful, soft commotion: America had at long last become fully conscious of its grandeur: of the magnitude of its history, of the special stature of its great men and women . . . America discovered that Washington and Lincoln and Jackson and Jefferson were not wax figures set up as models for school children, but that these men could walk beside Burke and Peel and Locke and Montesquieu . . . and it discovered that Whitman and Dickinson and Melville and Crane were not just the authors of pieces to be declaimed at school graduations, but men and women of great song and profound insight.

These were the Twenties. These were its legacies. What happened toward the end of October 1929 only meant that some of the economic underpinnings of our way of life had become a bit shaky. The basic treasures of what for a decade had been our new and glorious Bohemia, our full awakening to our national magnificence, remained intact, and set in motion a cultural development that, as the English already know insofar as our literature is concerned, will flower into something tremendous in history. Remember this: on the very same day in 1929 that Wall Street was probably in its most confused state there was published a first novel called *Look Homeward, Angel*.

# Azriel and Yolanda

CHARLES ANGOFF

IT IS TRUE that as we grow older we incline to think more and more about our experiences in our youth, and apparently we meet people who were parts of our lives in those earlier days. At least so it has been in my life. The past few months I have met a half dozen men and women whom I had not seen for thirty and even forty years. Two of them especially have stirred my memory and made me think of all sorts of general philosophical aspects of life.

It's very strange how time changes the course of things and people; how what you least expect does happen, and how what you're sure will come out simply vanishes. One cannot be sure how people and things will turn out. What goes on in our minds and what fate has in store for us seem to have little relation to each other. But enough of such vague general remarks. Let me tell you exactly what I mean.

Some four months ago, against my own wishes and only to satisfy my wife, who had been complaining that we hadn't been "going out" enough lately—funny, as men get older they want to spend more and more time at home, while as women get older, they want to "go out" more and more—we went to a party given by a Mr. Slotnik. I say, Mr. Slotnik's party, but I don't mean he was a bachelor, not at all. He's very much married. I don't know of any one who's more married. He does all the shopping, he cleans the house, and he does the inviting to their parties. But that, too, is another matter.

Anyway, we went there. The party wasn't good, it wasn't bad. There were teachers, doctors, dentists, some widows who, by their own words, were "very active" in their synagogues and temples—the usual kind of party we've been going to. But as the evening went on I became more and more sure that I had met one of the men there before. When I was introduced I didn't quite get his name,



but during the evening I did hear his first name: Azriel. That, however, was not very enlightening. I also learned that Azriel was a sort of accountant: a bookkeeper, but more, how much more I couldn't make out. That didn't help either.

Azriel looked like he was in his middle sixties; a man sort of sad and resigned. He was belligerently resigned. I asked my wife if Azriel looked familiar to her—we've been married for almost thirty years, and she knows all about me and my friends—but she only gave me one of her superior looks. She said, "You and the people you've known. Half of them are only in your mind. And everywhere we go you see people you think you've known before. It's your mind."

But just because it was in my mind I became more and more curious about Azriel, and I went over to him and told him that I had been wondering all evening about him. He smiled and said, "And I have been wondering all evening about you. Do you come from Boston?"

With that question I remembered him at once: he had taught at the Hebrew School in Boston where I had been a student, and I even recalled his full name: Azriel Feinberg. We talked on and on. And as we talked a very fascinating episode out of my life and Azriel's life, in the distant past, came back to my mind. When I last knew him he was a teacher and I was a student, and there was a difference of about fifteen years in our ages, so naturally we had no social contacts; but now, as we both were older, the difference in our ages didn't seem so sharp, and we conversed like contemporaries. He had no inhibitions as he talked, and indeed seemed to find great satisfaction in telling me some very personal things about himself, and not all of them were complimentary. At the same time he seemed to have little interest in what had become of me. For a while I felt offended by this lack of curiosity on his part, but then I was rather pleased, because I really had nothing much to say: I have a small printing shop, surely nothing to brag about—nothing to be ashamed of, yet no reason for being called a leader in Israel. No. What is true, is true.

Azriel, as I say, taught at the Hebrew School where I went. He was finishing his liberal arts education at Tufts College and planned to go on to law school. But it was freely rumored, in his

presence, too, that he would probably never go to law school, because his heart really was in Jewish matters— education, Zionism, relief for European Jews, and so on. Some even prophesied that he would go to a seminary and become a rabbi. He did not deny any of these reports; as a matter of fact, he seemed to glory in them, for they certainly reflected his innermost hopes and aspirations. He was one of the most ardent Hebraists in the school, seeing no virtue whatsoever in Yiddish as a language or as a culture. He sparked every Zionist appeal and was in seventh heaven whenever he was selected to make the welcoming speeches to such Zionist dignitaries as Nahum Sokoloff and Dr. Shmarya Levin.

Azriel had one difficulty—and it was a serious one. He was very much in love with a teacher in the Hebrew school, and all he could get out of her was a sneering tolerance for his attentions. Yetta Hurwitz made no secret of her doubts about Hebrew or Zionism, and because of this she had been reprimanded several times by the principal. But she was kept on as a teacher because she had a way with her pupils, and her pupils invariably walked off with most of the prizes. Besides, Yetta's father was a good supporter of the school. Whenever the Hebrew school had financial troubles he could be depended upon to make a sizable contribution.

One day Yetta announced that she had changed her first name to Yolanda. Her fellow teachers and many of her friends took it as another sign that she was trying to get farther and farther from Jewish traditions. Yetta was an old Jewish name, while Yolanda was Christian. Some claimed that Yetta—or Yolanda—was planning to change her last name also, but this was only malicious gossip, for Yetta was satisfied with becoming Yolanda. She spoke vaguely of going into social work, but people didn't take her future plans seriously, except to note that Jewish matters did not play a part in them.

Azriel apparently fell in love with Yolanda at first sight. Everybody knew about it. Even as a young boy I sensed his deep attachment to her. His face would literally light up and glow whenever he would see her. He tried to be near her as much as possible, and at school picnics he bought her frankfurters, candy and anything she wanted. At Chanukah parties he would find all sorts of ways to

help her with her pupils. He walked home with her whenever possible—and whenever she permitted it. In time she seldom permitted it. She told him, first in private and later in front of others, "I can walk home myself—I'm not sick or unable to defend myself. I don't need a bodyguard."

Azriel's friends felt sorry for him, but while he was doubtless offended he continued pressing his attentions upon Yolanda. Then she began to make fun of his deep-felt convictions about Jewish affairs, calling him "narrow-minded, medieval, backward, uncivilized, silly, fanatical, prehistoric." She preached attachment to humanity at large rather than to a small part of it, and she pointed out to him that "other people have contributed to civilization, not just the Jews, and in some things, perhaps, the Christians have done better than the Jews, like in painting, for instance."

He didn't answer her. Not because he didn't have an answer, but because he was too pained by such talk from one whom he loved so dearly. He kept quiet, and continued to ask for dates. There were times when it seemed that she had changed her feelings toward him, for she would let him walk home with her, two, three times a week—suddenly she would barely talk to him for days and weeks at a stretch. Then, abruptly, she gave up her position as a teacher, and that was the last I saw of her for about thirty years. Azriel obviously was heartsick. Her going was as much a surprise to him as to anyone, but he kept on teaching, and soon enrolled in the Boston University Law School. About this time I left Hebrew school. I was over my *bar-mitzvah* and I utilized my time after English school by working as a messenger boy in a market.

But I heard a great deal about Azriel. He and his love for Yolanda were the subject of considerable gossip in the community. Azriel finished law school while teaching Hebrew school to help pay his expenses. He saw no other girl. No one spoke to him about Yolanda. No one, in fact, knew where she was. There were rumors that she had gone to Chicago and to California and that she was in Europe for a long stay. Her father volunteered no information, and no one asked him. A bit later there were rumors that Yolanda had married a Gentile in a distant city—some said Pittsburgh, some said New Orleans, some said Portland, Maine—and that that was

why her father did not speak about her.

Then, one Sunday afternoon, she and Azriel were seen walking together on the Charles River Esplanade. They were just walking together, not saying a word to each other.

People forgot the previous rumors and began to speculate about the future. Some said that Yolanda had relented and would marry Azriel. Others said that she had come back to tell him once and for all that she would never marry him and for him to forget her. Then there was a group that said that Yolanda had come back only because her father had asked her to, for her to right the wrong of her previous insults to Azriel—that she had come back to ask his forgiveness and would leave at once for some other place.

The fact is that Azriel and Yolanda were never again seen together. Shortly after this last meeting with her, Azriel left the Hebrew school and moved to Providence. There he practised law for a while but soon gave it up. He had lost all interest in the law. Then he studied accounting but didn't have the patience to finish his course. He learned enough, however, to be able to get a fair job as a bookkeeper. This, too, began to pall on him. So, for a reason best known to himself, he took up typewriter repairing. This course he finished, not so much because he really liked typewriter repairing, but because it was a short course, and before he had a chance to change his mind, the course was finished. Thereafter he had two occupations: bookkeeping and typewriter-repairing, and that's how he made his living. In Providence he met a widow with two children—she was about two years older than he—and he married her. Shortly afterward they moved to New York, and they've been living there for almost twenty years now. The children are married and Azriel and his wife are living by themselves.

But more important things happened in Providence. He lost nearly all his interest in Judaism—in Hebrew, in Zionism, in appeals for Jewish causes. He did not become anti-Jewish, as so many so-called Jewish intellectuals of those days did. He frankly said to me when I saw him, "I'm afraid what happened to me is that I lost interest in all—what shall I say?, ideas—ideas about everything. I'm just a vegetable intellectually and spiritually. The postman who brings the mail, the policeman on the corner, the cab driver, they

have more interest in ideas than I have now."

I looked at him in surprise, though I said nothing.

"You don't seem to believe me," he said, smiling. "Now when the whole world is in such a turmoil, when two basic ideas are in such conflict, perhaps more than ever before in all history, at such a time I shouldn't have any interest in what's going on? Well, of course, I know what's going on. How can you help knowing—with all that one hears on the radio and television? But it's different now than what it used to be for me. I don't care as much. I don't care at all, really. I have not gone to a Zionist meeting for I don't know how many years. My wife, she goes to Hadassah meetings and brings me magazines and pamphlets, but I can't read them. I look at them, but no more. She drags me sometimes to a lecture. What I hear I heard twenty, thirty, forty years ago." He smiled. "Why, I said the same things myself, and you heard me say them plenty of times in Hebrew school."

I was wondering what he was really interested in now, but I didn't quite know how to ask him such a question. He munched peanuts most of the time, and just listened.

Then, out of the proverbial blue Azriel said, "You know what I really like?"

"What?"

"Movies and television. Even the bad ones. I would rather watch them than listen to lectures. Even the bad movies and television programs have something funny once in a while. I don't much like the serious ones. I like only the funny ones. The funnier the better."

"Well," I said in a somewhat superior manner, "I'm afraid . . ."

He laughed. "I'd rather look at a pretty girl and hear her talk nonsense than listen to an intellectual woman or an intellectual man, for that matter. Recently my wife *shlepped* me to a Hadassah meeting where some young American-Jewish woman writer talked about politics and religion and God knows what else, and I was bored."

As he talked I recalled, of course, his ardent Zionism, his ardent Judaism of long ago . . . I was sure, at the time, that he would spend the rest of his life advocating Hebrew and Jewish practices—that Judaism would be the core of his life. To the best of my knowledge all the others who knew him thought the same. I wondered whether

these others knew what had happened to Azriel. Oh, I wanted to ask him so many things, chiefly why he had changed. But something told me that I better not. And I wanted to know if he ever thought of Yolanda. It seemed very important for me to know this, and several times the question was at the tip of my tongue. But I didn't ask. A vague sense of propriety held me back. He didn't mention Yolanda's name either. Perhaps, I thought, he had forgotten all about her, but, then, I wasn't so sure—not at all sure . . . there was that strange look that came to his eyes now and then . . . Then we sort of separated, as happens at parties, but the rest of the evening I thought only of him. And when my wife and I went home I spoke only about him, so much so, in fact, that she finally had to say, "Goodness gracious, can't you stop talking about Azriel? There are other people in the world, and it may be that they are interesting too. You and the strange assortment of men and women in your past. Please, I don't want to hear any more about Azriel the rest of this night."

I said nothing more about him, but I kept on thinking about him. Then, about a month later, on a Madison Avenue bus, I saw a woman—I was actually standing beside her—who looked familiar. Suddenly I remembered Azriel and his past, and I became bold enough to ask the woman if she wasn't the Yolanda of Boston from way back . . . She gasped and said, "Why yes, and you're one of the students who . . ."

The bus was hardly a place to carry on an intimate conversation, but I did get some information out of her, or rather she volunteered it. She was going to a regional Hadassah meeting, was now extremely and almost exclusively active in Jewish affairs, had been to Israel three times in the past ten years, taught Sunday school, was an ardent Hebraist, belonged to the sisterhood of the temple in her neighborhood in Boston . . . and . . . was still unmarried. The last bit of information, somehow, startled me. It made me feel very sorry for her, though she seemed perfectly content. Then she said, smiling, "I suppose this all surprises you, considering how I talked long ago."

"Well, I don't know," was all I could say.

"Well," she said, "it surprises many people. What life does! But I'm happy, really happy."



"I'm glad."

She looked off into the distance, smiled, then turned to me and asked, almost shyly, "Do you remember a teacher in Hebrew school, by the name of Azriel . . . ?"

"Yes," I blurted out. "I saw him only a few weeks ago."

"You did?"

"Yes."

"What does he do now, what does he look like? Tell me."

I told her as much as I could in the crowded, jostling bus, and she listened attentively. She kept on saying *really?* as I talked. And when I finished she said, "Well, that's interesting. If you see him again, remember me to him."

Suddenly she realized that her stop was approaching and she said goodbye and was off.

I wish I had taken her address in New York, or her address in Boston . . . that I had asked her to come up to the house . . . Why I didn't I don't know . . . On the other hand, I don't know why she didn't ask me to have a coffee with her, or ask for my address . . .

That night I told my wife about meeting Yolanda. She seemed more interested in *her* than Azriel. After I finished talking, she said, "Fate does cruel things—especially to women."

# The Cultured One

CHARLES ANGOFF

EARLIER THIS WEEK I met Dorothy O. Gordon in a theatre lobby off Broadway. I hadn't seen her for about ten years. She looked much older than I had expected she would look—she looked about twenty years older than when I had last seen her. I introduced her to my wife. There was a short chunky man next to her, and he listened in to our conversation. He seemed to be her escort, but Dorothy did not introduce us to him. When my wife and I left her, I said goodbye also to the man, and he smiled back.

Later that night I said to my wife, "I'd swear that man is her friend and she's ashamed to have other people know it."

"Oh, you," said my wife. "Always imagining. You don't even know if the man was just one of those who listens in to other people's conversation, she may have been there all alone, and maybe we should have invited her to have coffee with us after the show. I feel terrible about not doing that."

"I still say he was her escort and she was ashamed," I said.

If my wife knew Dorothy O. Gordon as well as I do, or did, she wouldn't be so sure that the man was not her escort. I can't prove that he was, but I'm pretty sure. More than that, I think I know what that man does. He's not engaged in any intellectual activity, he's not even a literary agent, he's not even a printer, he's not even associated with a book or magazine distributing concern; if he were, Dorothy O. Gordon would gladly have introduced him to us, for she looks upon every one of those and similar occupations as sufficiently intellectual, in some remote way, for her to be proud of, at least not to be ashamed of. The man clearly was a salesman in some hardware store, or he sold tickets at a baseball stadium, or perhaps he was a masseur. I didn't dare to say any of this to my wife, for then she would give me one of her looks. I once said something like this to her about another woman and her man, and my wife looked at me and said, "With your imagination, you could be one of



those gloomy Russian writers. Can't you ever imagine something nice about a person?"

Now about Dorothy O. Gordon. Notice that I have included the O. every time I have mentioned her name. That's important, as you will soon see. Many years ago, it must be thirty years, I was a junior accountant in a large accounting firm in downtown New York City. I don't mind telling you, I was just a graduate of an accounting school. I tried the examinations for Certified Public Accountant, CPA, you know, but I couldn't make it, they made it ridiculously tough. So I was working there, that was long before I was married. At first, I did general accounting, then they put me in the book and magazine department, where we audited only book publishers, magazines, newspapers, all kinds, the biggest and the best, in all kinds of languages, not just English, but French and German and Italian, and in that way we got to know lots of people in the publishing line. And that's how I met Dorothy O. Gordon. She was a secretary in the book and magazine section. Frankly, I sort of took a shine to her. She looked sort of Bohemian, with bangs, a wide skirt, you know, wide at the bottom, a full bosom, and she smoked a lot. And she talked about books and plays and not just American ones, but German and French and Italian, especially German. I didn't ask her, but I sort of got the idea that she was of German origin and really knew German.

Whenever we got a job at a German book house or magazine she'd sort of take a special interest, she'd tell the rest of us all about the books the German house published and she'd talk about the magazine, how good it was or how bad. And in general she'd talk a lot about German literature, and I got to thinking she really knew a great deal about it, especially since I knew almost nothing about it. She would say such things as, "Thomas Mann is the great chronicler-moralist of contemporary German fiction. He's pessimistic, but in a cosmic, one might almost say, Schopenhauerian sense . . . Heine was a metaphysical lyricist, whereas Keats was a pure lyricist . . . No, German literature, even in the person of Thomas Mann and Heinrich Mann, his brother—some people consider Heinrich even greater than Thomas—German literature of our day still has to produce another Goethe."

The supervisor of the book and magazine section would bring German letters and leaflets for her to translate. Sometimes she would translate them on the spot, and sometimes she would take them home and bring the translations in the morning. Now and then I would take a glance at the things she translated on the spot, and I saw that I could have translated them myself. Some simple German is pretty much like Yiddish and my knowledge of Yiddish is sufficient for me to understand simple German. Apparently Dorothy O. Gordon's knowledge of Yiddish was equally sufficient for her to be able to get the meaning of simple German. But I still didn't think more of this matter, for, after all, she did translate longer and more difficult things. Generally she did this overnight, and I couldn't imagine her doing this entirely with the aid of a German-English dictionary.

Then a German-born girl came to work for the firm. One of the men in our book-magazine section was sweet on her and he would sometimes ask her to meet him, in the evening, at our office. Her office was on the sixth floor of the building we occupied (an old brownstone house, which had formerly been a dwelling), and ours was on the second floor. The man apparently told the girl about Dorothy O. Gordon's knowledge of German, so she naturally began to talk to her in German. Dorothy O. Gordon did not answer in German, she only smiled and answered in English, and it was obvious that Dorothy O. Gordon did not know what the girl was saying. "I speak German so badly I don't want to embarrass you," she said by way of apology. "But I read it very well and, of course, I understand it." This made me wonder. The German girl never again talked to Dorothy O. Gordon in German.

One day one of the senior partners in the firm came to our office with a long memorandum, in German, from a German publisher who had bought rights to a book published by an American firm. He only wanted to know the essence of the memorandum so that he would know how to proceed. He asked Dorothy O. Gordon to give him the gist of the memorandum. She looked at it, smiled, and said, "It's rather technical, I'll give you the translation of the whole memorandum in the morning." The man needed the translation at once, and we learned later that the German-born girl on the sixth

floor gave it to him. This time, I not only wondered, I was disturbed, for, to be frank, I had got to like Dorothy O. Gordon quite a bit. Did I take her out? Of course, I did. I went to her house, I met her family, a mother, a brother, and a sister.

I liked the family. I liked the mother and the brother and the sister. The mother was an old-fashioned Jewish mother, with her interest concentrated in her family. The sister was a bit younger than Dorothy O. Gordon, married to a pleasant business man, and the brother was publicity man for one of the smaller movie chains in New York, I don't exactly remember the name. I saw at once that Dorothy O. Gordon was considered by the family as the cultured one. One evening, the brother said, "When it comes to long-hair dramas, I say nuts, I leave that to Dorothy. She's the one who knows about books and serious plays." And the sister said, "I like musicals, Dorothy likes weepy plays. She likes heavy music, too, I like popular songs."

One day, at Dorothy O. Gordon's home, there came up a discussion of Sherwood Anderson. I had read his *Winesburg, Ohio*—which he had suggested I read—and I liked it—I wasn't excited about it, like a little more story in a story, not just mood—still I liked it, but his novels, like *Many Marriages* and *Poor White*, I found very dull, and I said so. The brother and sister didn't take much part in the discussion, though it was obvious that Sherwood Anderson was not their dish. Then Dorothy began to talk about Anderson, especially about *Many Marriages* and *Poor White*, and I was amazed. She didn't even know the stories. She didn't even know, for instance, that Hugh McVey was the leading character in *Poor White*. And as she talked on I got the strange feeling that she hadn't read the books that she was defending. As I say, I was amazed, but somehow I wasn't very deeply offended, I don't know exactly why, I suppose it was because I still sort of liked her.

We went out together for the next few months, then we sort of cooled off, no special reason, just cooled off. I was a little embarrassed, because we worked in the same office, but I soon got the impression that she didn't mind. Anyway, other men took her out, men from outside the office. One was a high-school teacher, a widower with a grown boy, over twenty, and the teacher was about fifty him-

self, probably fifteen or more years older than Dorothy O. Gordon. Another was a man who ran a second-hand book store. He must have been in his sixties. A third was the manager of one of the smaller movie houses in New York, the kind that show foreign films. Then there was a man who had two haberdashery stores in Brooklyn. He seemed to me to be the nicest of the lot, but Dorothy O. Gordon liked him the least of all. She was hardly polite to him when he called, and behind his back she would say insulting things about him, such as, "Oh, he's so ignorant, he doesn't read a thing, and he likes Ginger Rogers, he doesn't even know who Helen Hayes is. It's real hard being with him." I almost asked her why she went out with him at all, but I thought that would be an impolite and impertinent question.

Then I noticed that Dorothy O. Gordon acted as a sort of book agent for her friends. Because of our accounting connection with virtually all the major book publishers in New York City and a few other large cities in the East, we could get books at wholesale prices, which is to say, at 40 per cent off. Dorothy O. Gordon told this to her friends. Somehow, apparently, this made her feel more literary, confirmed her reputation of being the cultured one. The result was that she was kept very busy ordering books at discount for her friends. Often, as I learned from overhearing her conversation on the telephone, she offered literary advice to her friends: "Oh, I don't know about Gide's *The Counterfeiters*, it's sort of sad . . . the story, oh, it's nothing much, really, about men and women in strange situations. Why don't you get something by Warwick Deeping? He's not profound, not like Dreiser or Thomas Mann, but nice, or maybe you'd like Robert Nathan's *One More Spring*, it's nice, not much of a story, but, after all, it's not the story that counts, you know that, it's the characters." Shortly afterward I read *One More Spring* and could hardly wait till I finished it. I found it to be a superficial novel, without a single character of any substance. As for *The Counterfeiters*, I couldn't get into it at all. I wondered why Dorothy O. Gordon didn't tell her friend that the book was about homosexuals. I wondered whether she had read the book. I wondered whether she had read *One More Spring*.

About this time there arose in the office a discussion about middle

names. One man said that the S in Ulysses S. Grant's name stood for nothing, another man said that it stood for Simpson. Then a man said boastfully that he had no middle name, no initial, "nothing, I'm just like Abraham Lincoln and George Washington and Jesus Christ, they had no middle names." Then they began to discuss the middle initials and names of the people in the office. One said that her F. stood for Francine: "my mother wanted to make me fancy, like Dolores is now; well, she meant well, and now she admits that it's sort of strange, so I just have it F." Another, a man, said the middle M. in his name stood for Morris. A third, also a man, said that the X. in his name stood for his name saint, Xavier, St. Francis Xavier. Then they came to Dorothy O. Gordon. They asked her what the O. stood for. She hesitated, hemmed and hawed, then she admitted, "Well, I might as well tell you, it stands for Ouida."

"Never heard of that for a name," said one of the men. "Is it Italian or Hindu language, or is it the name of a disease?"

"It's a penname for a well-known writer," said Dorothy O. Gordon.

"What writer?"

"A great poet and playwright and a novelist, and a lecturer, a very greater writer," said Dorothy O. Gordon.

"Yes, yes, but what was her real name?"

"It escapes my mind at this minute, but she was very great," said Dorothy O. Gordon.

"That's funny," said a man who had kept silent till now. "It's like not knowing your own name."

"It just escapes my mind at this moment."

"Was she American? Was she English? Was she a foreigner?" persisted the same man.

"It's hard to say," said Dorothy O. Gordon.

"Why?"

"Well, she traveled, from England to here and to other countries."

"But this Ouida was born somewhere, lived somewhere . . ."

"Of course," said Dorothy O. Gordon, "but haven't you ever forgotten anything?"

"Yes, but I've never forgotten my name."

I noticed that Dorothy was about to burst into tears, so I said, "Oh, hell, people forget all sorts of things, what difference does it make anyway?"

But while I came to Dorothy's defence I was embarrassed by what had happened, embarrassed for her . . . I almost wished I hadn't been present at what had happened.

For the next few days the office was unusually quiet. Everything returned to the way it had been, but there was a strange embarrassment hovering over the entire place . . . people were polite to Dorothy, but now they referred to her merely as Dorothy, whereas hitherto they sometimes referred to her by her full name, Dorothy O. Gordon or Dorothy O. . . . I got the impression, when I first came to the office, that Dorothy was especially proud of the initial O. . . . but now people only called her Dorothy . . . not once did anybody say Dorothy O. Gordon or Dorothy O. The very deliberateness of it all was a thick cloud over the office.

But in a couple of weeks Dorothy seemed to be her old self again. She was once more offering literary opinions to her friends, once more taking orders for books at discount rates, once more discussing plays which she had not seen but had merely read reviews of.

Then I left the firm and did not see Dorothy regularly. But I did meet her several times—in the library, in this or that theatre lobby, or at lectures, or on the street. And I noticed that when the men she was with were "intellectual," within her broad definition of the term, she introduced me with pride for herself, but when her escort was a "mere" business man or clerk, she merely went through the formalities of introduction. How did I know they were "merely" business men? I sensed it. Besides, with the "intellectuals" she made a point of highlighting their occupations: "I want you to meet Peter Ravden, he's the lower New York representative for United Artists, you know the firm, high-grade motion pictures . . . I want you to meet William Trenton, he does drawings for some of the better labor periodicals . . . I want you to meet Gerry Wilmot, he runs a tutoring service for student pharmacists, and he'll soon have a pharmacy of his own, a real pharmacy, not a soda and toast place."

Dorothy must now be in her very late forties, more likely in her



fifties. She looks rather frumpy—I wouldn't say this to my wife, for reasons that you now know—and her dyed coal black hair offends me physically—this, too, I didn't say to my wife. Naturally, I know nothing about the man she was with when my wife and I met her. But he's pretty much like the other men who have been in her life. Maybe she fools all of them for a while the way she fooled me. When she was much younger, and before she talked her culture talk, she made a good first impression. But then one's interest in her begins to go down. But you might ask, aren't there many women who are phonies the way Dorothy O. Gordon is? Of course, there are. Many of them get married and have families. Why Dorothy O. Gordon has not managed to get herself a husband I don't know. But I am reminded of what a very wise man, a physician friend of mine, once said, "Any girl, if she sets her mind to it, can get herself a husband, if she has enough sense to keep her mouth shut while the man is courting her. But there are very few women in this world who know how to keep their husbands emotionally. Keeping a man home and keeping him in love with you are two different things."

## Poems by Charles Angoff

### I Saw Walt Whitman

I saw Walt Whitman  
In Indiana,  
I saw Stephen Crane  
In Oklahoma.

I saw Longfellow  
In Texas  
And Whittier  
In Kansas.

I heard Vachel Lindsay  
Singing to Emily Dickinson  
In Tennessee,  
And down the roads  
Of Kentucky walked  
Edgar Allen Poe  
And the bearded man  
Who wrote  
"The Man with the Hoe."

And I listened to  
Edna St. Vincent Millay  
And Stephen Benet  
All the way  
To Missouri,  
Arkansas and Utah  
And on to California  
And Washington and Oregon.  
And they congregated  
On the mountains  
And the rivers  
Where soon came many others,



And there they still are talking  
 And still are laughing  
 And still are singing  
 And will forever more.

## A Mother to Her Sleeping Child

You are the stillness  
 And blessed tumult,  
 Every soft goodness  
 Of my sweetest dream.

Sleep, my darling,  
 Sleep and sleep.

You are the first song  
 I hummed in girlhood,  
 And day and night long  
 Whispered later on.

Sleep, my darling,  
 Sleep and sleep.

You are all summer,  
 Spring, fall and winter,  
 Before and after,  
 Here and far beyond.

Sleep, my darling,  
 Sleep and sleep.

You give sanctity  
 To earth's whole being,  
 And warm unity  
 To the world and me.

Sleep, my darling,  
 Sleep and sleep.

## Saturday

Saturday is the  
Seventh day  
Every week

The Bible  
Says so

Every Saturday  
God rests  
And I wonder how

Is there television  
In heaven?  
Baseball games?  
Circuses?

Every Saturday  
I wonder  
Is God happy?

## An Afternoon in the Fine Arts Museum

So many centuries  
Of song muted  
In stone and jewelry  
And beribboned mummy—

So many immortals  
Become so temporary  
And five millennia  
Of proud grandeur  
Excavated as dust—

A man said,  
 "This is what happens."  
 A woman said,  
 "It's hard to believe."  
 A little girl said,  
 "I'm tired,  
 Let's go to the zoo."

## Roundelay for These Times

Leap high.  
 There is no sigh  
 In the sky.

Keep whirling.  
 Every yearning  
 Is a blessing.

There is no sorrow  
 In any tomorrow.

Leap high.  
 All wonder  
 Comes from yonder.

Turn round  
 And round.  
 There's sweet madness  
 Beyond time's sadness.



CHARLES ANGOFF, sketch drawn from life by Oscar Berg

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# The Importance of Charles Angoff

I. THOMAS YOSELOFF

IN THE demi-world of literature, raucously inhabited by publishers, authors, editors, publicity men and reviewers, sixteen years is a long time, and few relationships outlast half a generation. Loyalties have a way of shifting—publishers swear allegiance to the authors who happen to be selling best at the moment, and authors move with easy conscience to publishers who hold out the biggest promises and the fattest advances. So it is that I can view with a great deal of pride—not unmixed with a touch of wonder—the sixteen years that I have been Charles Angoff's publisher, and I can look forward with more than the usual satisfaction to seeing through the press this fall the eleventh book by him that I have published.

This issue of a journal that has already found a niche for itself in the American literary scene belongs to Charles Angoff, and it is presumptuous to intrude. Yet what I have to say can be said only by telling about myself in relation to Charles Angoff—about the sixteen years in which, already secure in his reputation as editor and anthologist, he built an entirely new reputation for himself as a novelist portraying a vanishing segment of the American dream.

It was one day in the winter of 1943 that I first met Angoff. He had burst upon my consciousness twelve years earlier, when as a college student I first came upon the wonderful world of the *American Mercury*. (No one can know quite how wonderful that world was who has not been a college student in Iowa in the years when the Republican era of the twenties was dying its inglorious death and there was a new world in the making.) In the old *Mercury* the juggernaut from Baltimore crushed with a satisfying finality the provincial boobocracy, the religious and academic smuggeries. To a young man just approaching the end of his teens, it seemed that the giantkillers were laying about them with such ferocity that there would be no ogres left to battle when I joined the fray.

It was the glorious end of the era of muckraking that had started with the daring of Henry Demarest Lloyd and Upton Sinclair and Lincoln Steffens and Ida Tarbell, that had brought to prominence Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser—men who dared to break lances against the giants of industrial and political and social corruption. (How sad to reflect that the giantkillers are gone, but that the boobocracy remains and the Babbitts, the smug, the righteous and the reactionary, still rule, hardly ruffled by the breeze that passed over them.)

In all this Charles Angoff was one of the chiefest players, the midwife to the new world aborning, privy to every council in the halls of the muckrakers. As managing editor of the old *American Mercury*, he was the overseer in residence for the absent Henry L. Mencken, and it was he who worked with the *Mercury's* contributors, planned each issue, was the confidant of the great and the nearly so. Later, when the full editorship fell to him, it was he who carried the *Mercury* through the difficult days when muckraking was dying, and with it the promise of the shining new world. Later stints on the *Nation* and the *Spectator*, when that paper was owned by the many-sided Charles Fingerhood, added lustre to his reputation as an editor. Then back to the reincarnated *Mercury*, and a lively coexistence with a publisher for whom the late Senator Taft represented pretty much the epitome of American statesmanship. Then, when the *Mercury* passed into new hands and began the long decline toward its present unsavory existence, this phase of Charles Angoff's career as an editor came to an end.

During his years as an editor he had found time for authorship too. He worked with Mencken on *The American Language* and in the early stages on the *Dictionary of Quotations*. How and why he finally broke with Mencken over the latter book is told with characteristic frankness in Angoff's *H. L. Mencken: A Portrait from Memory*, which I had the great pleasure of publishing in 1956. (The publication of this candid book so infuriated Alfred A. Knopf, who had been Mencken's publisher—and Angoff's—that he has since carried on a strange and intense vendetta against both of us.) During this period he was writing short stories and poetry which found wide publication in the literary magazines, and he conceived



and carried to completion his ambitious project for *A Literary History of the American People*. The first two volumes of this great project, bringing the story up to the early years of the nineteenth century, were published, but the final volumes, even though they were completed, were never published. Another great project found fruition with the publication of *Arsenal for Skeptics*, a sort of bible for the enlightened agnostic, in which he culled the greatest writings of all times on the subject of Judeo-Christian theology. At the insistence of Knopf, the latter book was published under the significant pseudonym of Richard W. Hinton.

Had Angoff's literary labors stopped at this point, they would have sufficed to establish his position in American letters. For an untried young man just out of Harvard to be thrown suddenly into this dazzling world was heady stuff indeed, and Angoff, with eyes and ears wide open, made the most of it. Managing editor of America's most important intellectual monthly at the age of twenty-four, by the time he was forty, he had already had a career as editor, author, playwright and anthologist. He could have rested on his reputation. But his greatest career was still ahead of him; it is as a major novelist that Angoff will rank permanently in American letters.

I think it was sometime in the winter of 1948 that Angoff came to me to discuss a project about which he had been thinking. I had already published a slim volume on the life of the composer Palestrina, a volume of short stories under the title *Adventures in Heaven*, a volume on the pre-Bach composers called *Fathers of Classical Music*, and a book of stories based on boyhood reminiscences under the title *When I was a Boy in Boston*. He had also found time in the post-war years to write and publish an extensive study of the American libel laws, and had underway a project for an anthology of the work of his long-time friend George Jean Nathan. But all this was merely practice for Angoff; he had been turning over in his mind an idea that kept growing until it allowed him no peace.

What he now proposed was nothing less than a major trilogy in which, through a single family, he would trace the Americanization of Jewish immigrants over three generations. When he came to me, he was troubled and apologetic. He was not even sure he could suc-

cessfully carry it off. He realized that he could hardly expect a publisher to gamble on the publication of three large novels of 700 or 800 pages each, not one of which had yet been written, by a man who had never written a novel before. We talked at some length about the scope and overall plan of the trilogy. I liked his idea, but he had not presented me with anything to which I could commit myself—this, at least, was my first reaction.

"At this stage, what can I tell you? What do you want?"

His manner and voice were thoroughly apologetic. "I know what I'm asking for is impossible, but I'd like you to say that if I write the books, you'll publish them."

I don't recall exactly what I said, but when Angoff left my office that day he took away with him my promise that if he would write, I would publish.

The rest is in the records. The first volume, *Journey to the Dawn*, appeared in 1950, and was greeted with such critical approval as rarely is given a first novel. Typical was the *New York Times* report, which found it "alive with compassionate understanding," and it summed up the reaction of the entire critical press with the comment: "*Journey to the Dawn* is a pioneering work of American fiction."

Since then, at intervals of a year and a half or two years, new volumes have appeared. *In the Morning Light* followed the first volume, then *The Sun at Noon* and *Between Day and Dark*. The trilogy has lengthened more and more and still more. The fifth volume, *The Bitter Spring*, is now in press, the sixth and seventh volumes have been completed, and by the time this appears in print, undoubtedly the eighth volume will be in typescript. In final form this massive work may well extend to eight thousand or ten thousand pages, and it may well be the most sustained single work of fiction in the history of literature. The work has not attained best seller status and it has not yet attracted the moguls of Hollywood, but year by year its stature has grown and it is being newly discovered daily by enchanted readers all over the world. After ten years, *Journey to the Dawn* has just come off the press again for its third printing, and its sales remain constant and growing.

What then is this giant multi-volume novel that Charles Angoff is creating? As each volume has appeared, it has found new cham-

pions. When the second volume appeared Meyer Levin wrote: "I have an idea that it will live," and with the publication of the third volume he was ready to say, "This is Nobel Prize material." Nelson Antrim Crawford called it "The best study of Jewish life ever written in this country," and other critics have been equally lavish.

The plan of the work is simplicity itself. Into the shell of autobiographical fiction, Angoff has spooned every morsel of well remembered childhood, boyhood and early manhood. The books abound with detail; every member of the family, every relative, every friend is given full treatment and emerges as a definable character. Reading the novels means leaving the broad, straight, swift turnpike, to meander along turning and twisting byways. It means traveling miles and miles more to reach the same destination, but, oh, the scenery you have experienced along the way! The books contain stories within stories, and even stories within stories within stories. Angoff digresses for a moment, and the moment becomes a novella of a hundred pages. A minor relative intrudes from out of the dim memory of the past, and succeeds in capturing the narrative for the next twenty thousand words. But this is the very essence of the work, and when you have finished each novel, you realize that all the loose threads have in fact woven together to produce a tapestry of faces and events, of color and movements, an artistic whole.

Destiny seems to have placed Angoff at the right place at the right time to record this vital pageant. He was indeed a "child of the century," having come into the world just as the dying age of Victoria became the twentieth century, just in time to live in his own lifetime the great saga of the immigrant. For it was just at that moment in history that the grand tideswell of immigration washed the shores of America, breaking in mountainous waves over Boston and New York and Philadelphia, and even over such remote ports as Galveston. The Polonskys of Angoff's story came, along with the hundreds of thousands of other Polonskys and diBellas, and as the old generation became the new generation, America changed them and made them American in dress, in appearance, in spirit. But at the same time they were changing America, too, so that the America of our mid-century is not the America that the immigrants found.

For this is a true love story—the marriage of the tides of immi-

grants with America—and our generation is the offspring of that passion. Into the mainstream of American life the newcomers injected their own dreams and ambitions and, by this infusion, brought the American dream of equality of opportunity and the hope of a better life a little nearer to reality.

John Barkham of *The Saturday Review* Syndicate, noting the publication of the fourth volume, wrote: “. . . it is an evocative and deeply-felt picture of a way of life that has vanished from the American scene but whose memory lingers on. Time was when the immigrant novel once held a salient position in American writing. Today it is a rare event, since the wave it represented became a part of the future it hoped for. Mr. Angoff's tetralogy is one of the most authentic examples of this genre—unhurried and deliberate, sentimental yet not slushy, an affectionate remembrance of things past.”

“Remembrance of things past.” It is of course inevitable that Proust should come to mind, both in the scope and the purpose of Angoff's masterwork. Like Proust, Angoff fills his pages with references to the symbols of the period he evokes, but here the resemblance ends. For Proust is first and foremost a stylist, more concerned with the form than the substance. His is a mannered period piece, subjective, brooding, highly introspective, thoroughly impressionistic in its perspective and coloration. While Angoff's work is not without its introspective mood—the changing world is seen always through the eyes of the sensitive autobiographical figure of David Polonsky—it is a mood of wonder, of change, of growth rather than of brooding. Angoff is not at all concerned with style—it is the narrative and the delineation of character through action and dialogue that concern him, and he proceeds straightforwardly, though quietly and unhurriedly, to the task at hand. If Proust is the impressionist, Angoff is the thoroughgoing realist. He eschews the bewilderment of the subjective novel for the wonder of photographic clarity. His colors are the colors seen in the frame of today's picture window—the greens of spring, the shimmering gold of summer, the reds and browns of autumn, and the clean stark white in winter. All this is as it should be. The man and the subject are well met. Proust is at home in Paris—he would be most uncomfortable in Boston's West End.

To say that Angoff is not a stylist is not to say that his work lacks style. The leisurely pace, the deliberately accidental digressions, the page after page of dialogue, the photographic clarity of events and people—all these are the paraphernalia of the story teller, not the journalist, and they add up to a characteristic as distinctive in its own way as Proust's mannered stylism. The swelling ranks of Angoff's readers now take on each new volume like a well-worn coat, nestling into the familiar folds, savoring the warmth, the smell, the feel of the garment, sliding into it almost unaware, so familiar has every crease become. This surely is the essence of style: that the writer can take his readers completely unaware into his own world.

Some critics have complained that Angoff writes of "good people." Life, they say, is not all good, and people are not all good. Men and women are by nature selfish, mean, vindictive, envious, dishonest, yet this side of the human character rarely is seen in Angoff's work. Angoff's answer to this is that it is quite true that people are not all good—but, they are not all bad, either, and if he chooses to portray the good in his characters, his work is thus not rendered less valid than the work of writers who choose to portray the dark side of humanity, whose books are too much filled with degeneracy, vice and brutality. Perhaps W. S. Gilbert summed the whole matter up as well as any well meaning critic could:

When a felon's not engaged in his employment,  
Or maturing his felonious little plans,  
His capacity for innocent enjoyment  
Is just as great as any honest man's.

I do not think that this criticism of Angoff's work is a valid one. True, the world is not entirely made up of Pollyannas and Pippas, but neither is it exclusively inhabited by Hamlet and Jack-the-Ripper. A writer has every right to be completely selective in deciding which elements in the human psyche have a place in his prose. To demand of a writer that he explore every facet of every character he introduces has no more validity in criticism than to suggest that a playwright must accompany every stage character to the bathroom in full view of the audience, in order to establish his claim to the genuineness of his people.



It is to be assumed that Charles Angoff is not unaware of the darker sides of humanity. As an editor deeply involved in the literary plot and counterplot of the twenties and the thirties, it seems clear that he must have seen enough envy, avarice and venom at work to establish in his own mind the pre-eminence of the human race in these areas. In many devastating essays, and in his book, *H. L. Mencken: A Portrait from Memory*, he proves that he is quite capable of portraying a man, good and bad, "warts and all." It is to be equally assumed that he would be quite capable of examining those close to him throughout his life with equal detachment and candor. That he has not chosen to do so does not invalidate his masterwork. He has simply shown once more the skill of the consummate artist in sorting out those elements which are relevant to the task at hand. He has left for others the literary skullduggery—and there is no lack of writers today who are quite willing to undertake the chore.

Perhaps one reason why Angoff has chosen to portray the gentler passions of humanity in his first four volumes is that he is himself a gentle man. Benedict and *paterfamilias*, he has proved his qualities in both capacities. His wife is with him at lectures and meetings as often as possible, as is also his daughter, who is becoming more and more the charming young lady every time I see her. He has proved that art can flourish as well on the kitchen table of a well ordered household as it can in the untidy garrets of the bohemians. Today he does all of his prodigious literary work in the evenings, or on week ends, between his full time academic duties as a Professor of American Literature at Fairleigh Dickinson University, sandwiched in between lecture engagements that take him many thousands of miles to all parts of the United States every year.

As he has grown in stature as a major novelist, he has not lost the modesty that is his most captivating quality. He presents at almost threescore years more the appearance of an ungainly and awkward country boy than the popular view of a major novelist internationally acclaimed. His eyes look out with utter candor and innocence from behind heavy horned rimmed glasses. Despite Harvard, Mencken and three decades in the literary milieu, his speech still retains a faint trace of the accent of his parents, and many people are startled upon first meeting him, so far is he from the usual preconception.



He is always quiet, soft-spoken. But in private conversations there is a snap and crackle that proves him still a master of the devastating characterization, of the sparkling repartee that must have been most useful to an editor fighting to maintain his footing in the Mencken era of literary acrobatics.

What is in store for Angoff? It is already abundantly clear that his position as a novelist of the first rank in the genre he has chosen is thoroughly secure. With the completion of the fourth volume in his ambitious saga, he has closed one phase of the story. His protagonist, David Polonsky, has moved on to New York, with a literary world ahead of him to conquer, just as Angoff himself did in the mid-twenties. It is inevitable that as the scope of his story broadens, so will the circle of his readers widen. While these have by no means been confined to Jewish readers, it is certain that the chief interest has been among Jews. Now Angoff is reaching out for wider interest: the saga of the immigrant must now share the limelight with America's golden age of critical writing, of which Angoff was so much a part. In the three decades that lie ahead in Angoff's telling of the story, he must abandon in part the individual stories of his own people to record on a broader canvas the story of America's coming of age. Perhaps more than Charles Angoff can guess, he is writing, in his immense undertaking, the Great American Novel.

## II. HAROLD U. RIBALOW

In recent years, the flood of Jewish novels has inundated the book market. Immediately prior to World War II, novels on Jewish themes by Jews were read by a hard core of "professional Jews," made no money for their publishers and had no impact on the general reading public. Only since the end of the war have Jewish works of fiction gained acceptability among non-Jewish Americans and, unfortunately, too many of them have been shoddy, slick commercial jobs and laced with violence and sensationalism.

Yet, here and there, we heard an authentic Jewish voice. A Ludwig Lewisohn novel, a Meyer Levin effort—and silence. As literature, most Jewish fiction was inferior to Abraham Cahan's *The Rise of David Levinsky*, published in 1917. The Ben Hechts, Jerome Weidmans, Norman Katkovs produced popular novels on American Jews, with underlying tones of self-hatred. When a Jewish

book was written, its author, out of rebelliousness and a sense of Jewish alienation, selected unappetizing characters and wrote with a sneer. The novelists wrote out of ignorance and without love. Thus, their work today is of historical interest. They did not attain the respectability which attaches to a serious, honest book.

Except for a handful of war novels (by Louis Falstein in *Face of a Hero*, by Ira Wolfert in *An Act of Love* and a few others), the Jewish novel gained readers but not stature. Anti-Semitism was the theme of practically every novel by Jewish writers who elected to do their Jewish book. Inter-marriage popped up frequently. The conflict between generations and the adjustment of immigrants to American life were also popular themes. There was no largeness of vision, no real ambition to produce a major novel, one which could stand with the best America and Europe had to offer.

The result is that we have today many Jewish writers and hundreds of Jewish works of fiction but few which deserve to be re-read or retained in one's bookcase. Of recent vintage, we possess Bernard Malamud, who creates out of love and with lyricism; Michael Blankfort, who has turned full circle from Marxism to an aggressive Judaism; and, primarily, Charles Angoff.

There are some others, of course, and there will be more. Yet it is safe to say that Charles Angoff is America's finest Jewish novelist, its most prolific, its most understanding and its most significant.

The reasons are not hard to find. Angoff already has produced four novels and two volumes of short fiction. His aim is simple but awesome: to encompass all of American-Jewish life, in its infinite joy and sadness; in its complexities and simplicities; in its agonies and fulfillments. He traces the lives of a huge family and tirelessly details the lives of scores of members of the clan. He does not restrict himself as to space. He is willing to introduce a character in fifty pages if that person deserves so many words. And many of them do. His first four novels are *Journey to the Dawn* (1951); *In the Morning Light* (1952); *The Sun at Noon* (1955) and *Between Day and Dark* (1959). His short story collections are *When I Was a Boy in Boston* (1947) and *Something About My Father and Other People* (1956). In the works are at least four more novels and, I'm sure, at least one more collection of tales.

It is remarkable, in a time of unimaginative novelists and lazy ones, that we have here a man in the European tradition, one who knows that his task is to write novels and that nothing can keep him from his task. Angoff has recognized that in his family—the Polonskys—he can tell us the entire history of American Jewry. He does so meticulously, passionately and memorably.

Unlike many novelists, who scarcely can handle their raw material, Angoff is cognizant of the problems of the Orthodox Jew; he remembers what it was like for the immigrants who came to America seeking the golden streets and finding grinding poverty; he can describe heartbreak and happiness with the skill of a poet—and throughout the four novels you are introduced to Jewish-American types met nowhere else in American fiction.

Israel, for example, has played a major role in Jewish-American life, yet until Angoff came along with his immense project, you hardly knew it from the novels that were issued. But in his books, the labor Zionists, the pious Zionists and the world-famed Zionist leaders of the past are part of the normal scene. Thus, any contemporary reader will gain many insights into the Jewish passion for a Jewish State through reading the pages of these books.

We all know that in tolerant America, Orthodox customs and habits have been undercut. The Conservative and Reform movements have gained adherents. But only in Angoff's novels can we discover, in human terms, how these changes came about. When the father of David Polonsky—the major protagonist in all the books—makes a decision to work on the Sabbath rather than deprive his family of its daily bread, it is a personal and also a national tragedy. When a Hebrew teacher's career is followed closely by Angoff (the teacher is one of the family), we learn a good deal about Jewish education in the United States. And when David finally attends Harvard University, we are told just which courses were good and which were windy. When David gets a job as a newspaperman in the Boston area (so far most of the books deal with the Polonskys in New England), we meet the Boston Irish, the firemen, the policemen and the Italians and the New England Yankees. In a word, life accosts us on every page.

The novels are crowded with characters and they teem with life.

Angoff appears to be expert in every field he attempts to describe. One of the relatives becomes a garment industry king. The depiction of his rise and fall is unequalled by any other Jewish novelist and is met only by Abraham Cahan. The sequences of illnesses that befall the clan, the scenes in hospitals, are as vivid as any of those in the good novels on medicine which crop up in the United States from time to time. And the portrayals of David's grandmother, Alte Bobbe, and of the socialists, the over-a-glass-of-tea philosophers, the shop workers and the fake intellectuals David meets are gems of portraiture.

Angoff has sensed that there is great drama in the adjustment of the Jews to the American tempo. He also knows that tragedy inheres in this adjustment. David and his father find they cannot communicate with one another. His uncles and aunts, some of whom marry after lyric love affairs, separate. The family slowly begins to disintegrate under the pressures of American life. But the family is still a family, in the face of disease, divorce, childlessness, financial failure—and success.

Charles Angoff's stamina is reaping its just rewards, for he is doing more than producing a fat series of novels to please himself and a handful of readers. He is attempting, in one gargantuan effort, to capture the essence of Jewish living in the United States. He admires his people and utilizes all his skill to show you why. These are not a collection of neurotic Jews contemplating their destiny as Jews. Yes, he includes a self-hating Jewess, doubting intellectuals and phoney philosophers. At the same time, he is bringing us up-to-date on a Jewish family which, in a very real sense, represents all American Jews. He does it with patience, with an artful selectivity in spite of the hundreds of thousands of words, and with an understanding of the problems American Jews face in a society which, because it is free, challenges them to retain their Jewish identity.

When Charles Angoff completes his project—and we devoutly hope he shall—he will have given us the most lasting single work of fiction on the American Jew that we can expect. He brings to his task impressive erudition and sensitivity. But he always remembers he is a novelist telling a story. It is a great story and so it is a brilliant group of books we can place on our shelves.

# Criticism

Margaret Fuller ~~once~~ began her essay on American Literature with the dry <sup>remark</sup> ~~statement~~ that ~~some~~ <sup>persons might perhaps</sup> ~~at the very outset~~ <sup>would</sup> ~~object to~~ reading an essay on ~~some~~ <sup>something</sup> that had no earthly existence. So I ~~may~~ say, I am going to write a chapter on something that does not exist—namely Criticism.

## Criticism

WALT WHITMAN

MARGARET FULLER began her essay on American Literature with the dry remark that persons might perhaps, at the very outset, object to reading an essay on something that had no earthly existence. So I may say I am going to write a chapter on something that does not exist—namely Criticism.

The lecturers have ~~it~~ a  
 stereotyped <sup>says</sup> that only ~~on~~ the ~~de~~  
 of a superior Literature comes  
 Criticism. It may be historically  
 true in the past; but it does not  
 need to be so for our <sup>day</sup> ~~purposes~~  
 the future. I can fancy how  
 the right kind of Criticism - the  
 indeed in the hands of men entirely  
 great - ~~might~~ <sup>might</sup> arrest, hold up to  
 & in due time ~~thoroughly~~ <sup>thoroughly</sup> exterminate, a false &  
 vicious school of <sup>current</sup> writers, however  
 popular they were at the ~~outset~~  
 & might <sup>prepared</sup> beget, & bring <sup>forward</sup> ~~out~~  
 maturity - ~~&~~ a crop of ~~&~~ noble  
 writers & even poets, instead. ~~But~~  
~~this is giving criticism the judicial~~  
 this is supposing a ~~the~~ stature of



Critics & Criticism - not higher<sup>(3)</sup>  
 than I think possible, nor perhaps  
 probable, some day - but far higher  
 than British or European literature  
 has ever yet ~~approached~~ afforded.  
 Few are they whose  
~~scale~~ <sup>scale</sup> can measure <sup>the</sup> unspeakable  
 value, to man, ~~or~~ of Literature.  
 Yet over it all is Criticism.

The lecturers have a stereotyped saying that only on the decline of a superior Literature comes Criticism. It may be historically true in the past; but it does not need to be so for our day or for the future. I can fancy how the right kind of Criticism—the Pen indeed in the hands of men entirely great—might arrest, hold up to scorn, and in due time thoroughly exterminate, destroy, a false & vicious school of current writers, & might prepare for, beget, & bring forward to maturity, crops of noble writers & even poets, instead. But this is supposing a stature of Critics and Criticism—not higher than I think possible, nor perhaps probable, some day—but far higher than British or European literature has ever yet afforded.

Few are they whose scale can measure the unspeakable value, to man, of Literature. Yet over it all is Criticism.

For criticism, <sup>carried to the height worthy of it,</sup> is itself a majestic  
~~that~~ office, <sup>(perhaps even a Church, in its ministry)</sup> perhaps an Art, necessitating  
 all the elements, all the acquirements,  
 -having central principles, comprehending  
 the universal, <sup>the all,</sup> yet with ~~the~~ keen eye  
<sup>and with,</sup> the quick ear, well aware of ~~the~~ ~~the~~ ~~the~~  
 passions & emotions, intuitive, intellectual,  
 yet far more than merely intellectual.

For Criticism, carried to the height worthy of it, is a majestic office, perhaps an Art, perhaps even a Church, necessitating in its ministry all the elements, all the acquirements,—having central principles, comprehending the universal, the all, yet with keen eye to detail and with quick ear, well aware of passions & emotions, intuitive, intellectual, yet more than merely intellectual,—possesses the wisdom of the experienced father & the wisdom of the mother, possesses the most fervent love of country, is equipt of course from the libraries, has indeed at command the whole arsenal of books, and must perhaps contain the special instinct of the love of books. These, with other traits, go to form the Critic. Then, as the breath of life to the fore-mentioned, or subtle coloring through which it all appears, a distinct perception and recognition of the wonders of Humanity and Nature, as before all books; and of the latter, while nothing in themselves, yet of the utmost importance as endeavoring to provide some argument or suggestive explanation on those tremendous wonders.

<sup>possesses</sup> has the wisdom of the experienced  
 father, <sup>or</sup> has the wisdom of the mother,  
~~has~~ <sup>possesses</sup> the ~~best~~ <sup>most</sup> fervent  
 love of country, ~~has~~ <sup>confuses</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup>  
~~equipt~~ <sup>of course</sup> ~~with~~ the  
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<sup>2</sup> ~~idocratically~~ <sup>instinct</sup> ~~as~~ <sup>of the love</sup> ~~love~~ of books.  
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 importance as endeavoring to provide some  
<sup>or suggestive explanation</sup> ~~argument~~ <sup>topics</sup> on those tremendous wonders.

Above all, he must be Religious. Not the soft ~~game~~ ~~melted~~ melted butter of ~~such~~ <sup>that</sup> deference & politeness ~~we~~ we see in ~~every~~ <sup>every</sup> "respectable" volume & magazine article; but the devout realizing, — which comes from the amplest knowledge, <sup>as strange to say, also from</sup> or extreme simplicity that man & the universe have a <sup>fitting</sup> proportionate purpose, & that Soul is <sup>such</sup> ~~that~~ it behoves to understand <sup>the</sup> outline of a Critic, ~~not~~ appropriate to <sup>the charge of the</sup> ~~the~~ great thing, <sup>and</sup> Literature, <sup>and</sup> especially <sup>for</sup> the splendid <sup>new</sup> era and inauguration of it, on the vast bases, & imperishable faith & directness, of the New World.

Above all, he must be Religious. Not the melted butter of that deference we see in every "respectable" volume & magazine article; but the devout realizing, — which comes from the amplest knowledge as strange to say it also comes from extreme simplicity — that man & the universe have a fitting purpose, & that Soul is.

Such ~~is~~ <sup>& no less</sup> ~~not a grain less,~~  
~~the~~ <sup>the kind</sup> ~~of~~ <sup>planter, waterer</sup>  
~~the~~ <sup>& pruning master</sup> ~~in~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~dearest~~ <sup>of</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>garden</sup>  
 civilisation demanded by our land &  
 Such the style ~~of~~ <sup>that</sup> ~~the~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~strong <sup>& full</sup> <sup>& perfect</sup>  
 individual man, and ~~from~~ <sup>provides</sup> ~~all~~  
 that is here, ~~provides~~ <sup>for</sup> ~~&~~ <sup>presupposes.</sup>~~

Such, it behooves to understand, is the outline of a Critic, appropriate to the charge of the great thing, Literature, any where and especially to its office & regulation for the splendid new era and inauguration of it, on the vast bases, & unprecedented faith & directness, of the New World.

Such, & no less, is the kind of planter, waterer, overseer & pruning master in the dearest of the gardens of civilization demanded by our land and time. Such the style that America, from her very geography, of unparalleled spread & variety, and from the nature of her race of many races, & from her crowning theory of seeking the strong & full & perfect individual man, provides for and presupposes.

What ~~Literature~~ <sup>Criticism</sup> ~~also~~ <sup>also</sup> needs to-day, ~~above all things~~, is ~~surely~~ something fresh from the mountains, ~~with the strong wind~~ - some ~~strong~~ pure gales of ~~Ease~~ & ~~such~~ <sup>the</sup> Heron - something well oxygenated, from snow & ice of the North. As ~~they~~ <sup>it</sup> stands, ~~they~~ <sup>it</sup> is helpless, listless, impotent, ~~rather~~ <sup>rather</sup> many. I ~~do not~~ <sup>do not</sup> intend to trust myself

beyond ~~the~~ toleration, and ~~is~~ <sup>is</sup> rapidly ~~will~~ fair, indeed, to become rotten soon become ~~little~~ <sup>not</sup> ~~and~~ <sup>a surface</sup> of some bubbles covering mass of putrefaction. Here is the Hercules' task of all. A resolute & original theory is indispensable.



What Criticism also needs to-day, is something fresh from the mountains,—some pure gales of Huron—something well oxygenated, from the snow & ice of the North. As it stands, it is helplessly listless, impotent, mangy, beyond toleration, and bids fair to soon become a surface of sour bubbles covering a mass of putrefaction. Here is the Hercules' task of all. A resolute & original theory is indispensable.

Has it never occurred to any one that the real test applicable to a book is entirely outside of literary tests; and that any truly original and grand production has little or nothing to do with the rules & calibres now in mode?<sup>1</sup>

[Note: Montaigne] I have fancied the ocean & the daylight, the mountain & the forest, putting their spirit in an utterance—and that utterance a judgment on our books, & especially on the current poetry of this country & Europe. I have fancied some lofty & disembodied human soul giving its judgment; & fancied emotional Humanity, in some single representative, giving its.

Perhaps the thought of this is the pre-requisite to an eminent literature, & the beginning of anything like good criticism. Yet certainly it is unthought of & unbreathed among all the European reviewers; as I certainly know of no Poetic theory or practice, except that of *Leaves of Grass*, holding it steadily in view.

<sup>1</sup> Instead of "calibres now in mode," Whitman originally wrote (and erased) "limits of those amusing book 'notices' and 'reviews,' and the airy gentlemen that make them."

Has it never occurred to any one ~~that~~ <sup>the real test applicable to a book</sup> that there are ~~standards of merit~~ <sup>entirely</sup> of ~~literary tests~~; and that, if a ~~great~~ <sup>the</sup> ~~product~~ <sup>out</sup> ~~the last~~ <sup>any</sup> original & grand ~~product~~ it ~~is~~ has little or nothing <sup>to do</sup> with the rules & ~~limits~~ <sup>agilities</sup> of ~~these~~ <sup>new</sup> ~~revisors~~ <sup>independent writers</sup> & "reviewers," & the ~~very~~ gentlemen that make

[Note: Montaigne] I have fancied the ocean & the daylight, the mountain the forest, putting their spirit in an ~~ance~~ <sup>ance</sup> - & that utterance a judgment on books, & especially on the current ~~po~~ of this country & Europe. I have fancied some lofty & ~~disembodied~~ <sup>disembodied</sup> human soul giving its judgment; & fancied <sup>emotional</sup> Human in some single representative, giving its.

Perhaps, this <sup>the thought of</sup> ~~is~~ <sup>the pre-requirement to</sup> ~~the prevalence of an eminent~~ <sup>undependable to</sup> ~~thing like good criticism~~ <sup>good</sup> literature, & to expel the beginning of ~~found~~ <sup>any</sup> thing like good criticism. Yet certainly it ~~was~~ <sup>not</sup> ~~unthought of~~ <sup>unthought of</sup> ~~among~~ <sup>unbreathed among</sup> ~~the European~~ <sup>the European</sup> ~~criticism~~ <sup>reviewers</sup>; as I certainly know of no Poetic Theory or practice, except that of Leaves of Grass, ~~holds~~ <sup>it</sup> ~~all that~~ <sup>steadily</sup> in view.

## Note on Whitman's Essay "Criticism"

The foregoing manuscript of Walt Whitman's essay or notes entitled "Criticism" has been made available to *The Literary Review* for publication for the first time through the good offices of the owner, Amy E. Spingarn, widow of the distinguished poet, scholar, critic and civic leader, Joel E. Spingarn (1875-1939).

"Criticism," although not publicly published before, has been privately printed twice. Both pamphlets are now out of print. The second private printing, consisting of two hundred copies, was done by Amy E. and J. E. Spingarn as a Christmas greeting in 1924 to their friends. Reference to the first private printing is made in the following excerpt from Professor Spingarn's "Prefatory Note":

"This essay, which is of exceptional interest in American literature as a Poet's exaltation of Criticism, was apparently written between 1865 and 1874, while Whitman was a clerk in the office of the Attorney General at Washington. The original manuscript . . . consists of nine pages, eight of them containing a blind Congressional stamp, and one of them bearing the letterhead of the 'Attorney General's Office, Washington, . . . 186 . .' All of them are written in pencil, except one, which is in ink (page 9), and they are covered with corrections, chiefly but not wholly in pencil. As the pages are not numbered, the arrangement adopted . . . must be regarded as tentative; and indeed it may be surmised that we have here, not a complete essay, but notes for a careful discussion of Criticism which Whitman may have intended for his 'Democratic Vistas' in 1871. The essay does not appear to have been published, but a privately printed edition of one hundred copies was brought out for its members by the Carteret Book Club, of Newark, N.J., in 1913."

The original size of the full manuscript page is  $10\frac{1}{2}$ " x  $7\frac{3}{4}$ ". Several of the nine pages are only partially filled.

July 20, 1959

Dear Mr. Decker,

I am very sorry, it would be better not to meet. It is not wished that I receive foreigners and talk with them. The bearer of this note, my greatest friend Mr. Oleg Trinsky, will explain you all, if you only speak Russian. Transmit also her the copy of the quarterly. If the necessity of consulting me is too great, write me better about whatever you wish per

post from New York after  
returning from your travel.

Pray Mrs. Spector  
and be so kind yourself  
as to accept my best  
regards. Don't offend  
yourself by my refusal,  
excuse me.

Sincerely yours

B Pasternak

Мини-прогностический  
Календарь 21/40  
7-му Январю  
Секрету

## Note on the Pasternak Letter

In the Spring 1959 number of *The Literary Review*, we published, for the first time in English, ten poems by Boris Pasternak in translations by George Reavey and an essay on Pasternak by Robert Payne. Mr. Reavey, who had known Pasternak personally while attached to the British Embassy in Moscow (1942-1945) and who had corresponded with him and translated his work as early as 1930, encouraged my hope to meet the writer and to present him with a copy of the *Review* during my visit to Russia that summer by offering to write a letter of introduction.

Shortly after I arrived in Moscow, I sent Pasternak a note through the regular mail to his home in Peredelkino, a writers' colony some twenty miles outside the city. A few days later, I received a telephone call from a person who asked to see me about the letter. When we met that night, he handed me Pasternak's reply, explaining that since he spoke English, he was substituting for the person referred to in the letter. My caller, the Moscow correspondent of a leading European newspaper, had known Pasternak for several years. We walked through the midnight-sun, moon-filled night in the plaza in front of my hotel talking about Pasternak, the political controversy over *Doctor Zhivago*, Pasternak's work-in-progress, the Russian literary scene . . .

My caller explained that the storm within the Soviet Union over *Doctor Zhivago* and the award of the Nobel Prize the author was forbidden to accept was beginning to subside, but that official hostility was still intense—a fact further impressed on me a few days later when I met with members of the Executive Committee of the Union of Soviet Writers, which had expelled Pasternak in 1958 following the publication of *Doctor Zhivago* in Italy.

Throughout the months of stress, Pasternak, long a hospitable host to writers, artists and admirers from all over the world, secluded himself from all but his family and intimate friends—a seclusion not broken until Leonard Bernstein, conductor of the New York Philharmonic Orchestra, called on him during the orchestra's visit to Moscow some weeks later.

The Pasternak letter reveals the fury of the political controversy as it affected the man who was its unwitting cause and innocent victim—the poet, novelist, translator and critic who, even before the Bolshevik Revolution, was on his way to becoming one of the literary masters of the twentieth century.

—CLARENCE R. DECKER



# Gods and Niblicks

Scene 2 from *The Tree Witch*<sup>1</sup>

PETER VIERECK

*Here is scene 2 of the author's new poem and play—first of all a poem—The Tree Witch. Its two voices—the modern narrators and the captured Hellenic dryad—are identified simply as WE and SHE, the first speaking not collectively but through alternating individual spokesmen. WE look both middle-aged and schoolboy (business suits above the waist, boyscout shorts below). The chance capture of SHE by WE, as described in preceding scene—*

*Callously innocent in our disinfected games,  
We plastic-swaddled children of fifty years  
With unlined faces, hacking down some gnarls,  
Unpeeled a dryad once, stript, trapt, and spitting—*

*launches the play's "dramatic conflict": the impact of her world of creative imagination and organic growth upon the WE world of civic adjustment and mechanized growth.*

SHE [*alone on stage*]:

From now on, courage is the one tree left me,  
Aërial trunk, as hard to hack as rock.  
Courage I learnt the day I overheard  
The senile outcast wine-god (doddering by  
With somehow springy step) drool in his beard  
(Amid deriders) this rejoicing tune:

*"An old man with flowers  
Is lament without sorrow.  
Delighted dust  
Perpetrates noon.  
Sound of reaping  
Even in springtime*

<sup>1</sup>© World copyrighted by Peter Viereck; all publishing and stage rights retained by the author.

Sings inside me  
Without sorrow.  
Soft wind,  
I am not afraid to die."

WE [*stomping in heavily*]:

Noon is a scandal  
Of hiccups and flowers.  
Disgrace without sorrow  
Is a wind of pariahs  
And weaves clamminess in.

SHE: Those words then too; but he without hearing:

"Once I was afraid.  
My feet felt toads.  
Now all is a wreath;  
I weave everything in.  
An exile at noon  
Is a flowering sorrow.  
An old man with flowers  
Is warm to the end."

WE: "The gods"—that's all we hear. For once define them.

SHE: Dolphin and resin glitters of delight.  
A god is simply what is unconditioned,  
Wonder to faith and question-mark to science,  
A nuisance imp to plan-worlds—call it "freedom,"  
Or "superstition." Synonyms today.  
Hold tight what spontaneities are left you,  
And barricade them from improved technology.  
Manipulated needs, kind as a mother  
Robot, push around the button-pushers.

WE: To ease you from the coiled up core of things,  
We offer you distraction's mezzanine  
And of synthetics all the plush and chock-full.

SHE: Because you are anonymous, you poach from  
Possessiveness your pale identities,

The pastel shades of being. Yet rouged as "vital";—  
Corpses and apples sport as bright a cheek.

WE: We give; you change. Come, tree girl, leave your blur world.  
Wall out those vista-curves of sprout and flux.  
Come try edged contours, try our blinkered vistas,  
Try all these feelings of solidity  
We paste together when we say, "A room."  
A cube of wall-to-wall swaddling. A square  
Wedding-ring to sanction our hug of swag.  
O how enough to praise a room's bonanzas,  
So pat, so tailored! And so muffled from  
The probes—the ice-winds—from between the suns.

SHE: Slim-streaking as the afterglow of trout,  
The same warm winds cascade through suns through veins.  
I do not ask the earth-beats at my feet  
If strummers or if echoes of my pulse.

WE: A room's foursquareness reassures there's nothing—  
Amoeba, soul—that scissors, paste can't fix.

SHE: Fuller and lonelier than walls account for,  
Your rooms are asteroids turned inside out.  
Their glows,

aimed inward as a blindman stares,  
Touch only through the icy Braille of doors,  
Numb to the secret tune-link all around you  
That, binding, frees

and, changing, never changes:

An overflowing pause

as hills are waves,

A static undulance

as waves are hills.

Have seen mere change, the color seeped away;  
Have seen mere stance, the pampered sentry slumped;  
Through wave through hill, gods dance their linking lilt.

[BALLET INTERLUDE: *Duplicated by big distorting wall-mirrors as if*

*she were several different dancers, dryad dances tauntingly past the*  
 WE, *who vainly try to grab her mirror images.*]

WE: Elusive is, how webbed your waywardness,  
 How secret-linked your random fluffs and whims.  
 That web, that rhythm!—sieves of chemic jargon  
 Can't sift that upwardness from sap. As if  
 Our jetted gallivantings winged that longing's  
 Mere quantity and bogged its quality.

SHE: Lambaste with niblicks, till your femurs falter,  
 The know-how marshes. Useless. Gimmicks wangle  
 Everything up except that wistfulness.  
 Planes are but swifter kind of trudge, not flight.  
 True flight is trance, airy and earthy both,  
 A feathering of arterial skyward lurch,  
 When body embodies more than body, yet  
 Seamlessly one. The key, the holy rape,  
 Is the word "yet,"

outside clay "yet" right here.

WE: That splits our wish, confused at touch of skin.

SHE: A prying epoch but no touch direct.  
 Because you learn by searchlight, not by feel,  
 Even your seers flash thin, like comet's rumpus,  
 Or mull on kickshaws as a camel chews.  
 Asthmas of book-dust between sight and insight;  
 A glove for clasps; for ripeness, cellophane.  
 I have lived trees more tactile one short day  
     (The bobbed-on twigs of daybreak, sag of noon,  
     Till lane on lane of muted evening sweetness)

Than all your lifelong mobile fingertips.  
 Touch! Bees won't touch your brilliantest glass flowers.

WE: Beneath our jaunty modern air, we ache with  
 An old hereditary desert-plague,  
 Called conscience-versus-touch, abstraction-versus-meat.  
 Our clasps are sties; not God, not meat; God's dung.  
 The more the aunts lock out, the more the pillows

Let in: our contradictions, vengeance-browed.

SHE: When will the galley-slaves of birth-guilt hammer  
Their chains to rungs, their nerves to stairs of fire?  
Out of blood's Pliocene and shark-reefed surf,  
Upright lurch from oarlocks, up bleak beach  
Where every final self-confronting duels.

There now let guilt's long wave pound out, subside.

Even then, slick off the tears of tragic limits  
Never. From rain, from curse, from sullen roots  
Radiance darkly earns the bloom you bless.

WE [*visibly struggling to recover our complacency*]:  
We'll solve that mishmash on dissecting tables.

SHE: Dissect away. Then patch with soul-molasses.  
I see twin midgets at a circus grandstand  
Pummel each other with bladders of science and faith  
While, way up there, the wine-god, belching  
An ode to tragic joy, spills popcorn down on both.

WE [*contentedly*]:

Both blend. The tractor and the galaxy.  
Two clockwork systems. Gears emit new goodies  
While—for our Sunday breadline, Sunday blood bank—  
Our stained-glass freezer stores dead flesh-and-blood.

SHE: Between the tractor and the galaxy,  
I comb my hair and lounge against my tree  
And watch a yellow butterfly slip through.

WE: To cold contraptions closing in on you.

SHE: No need invoking,

yet,

what "Aphrodite"

Is clue to; why, mere wisp of grace suffices  
To dodge you. No computer organizes  
The pranks and chipmunks of the bounce of twigs.

WE: They won't much care for pranks in Middletown.

[*Curtain descends briefly to suggest mood-reversal in WE before*

*Pan episode and to give time to re-arrange stage as follows. Right stage: a tidy business office. Left stage: a thicket labeled "Arcadia".]*

WE: But as it's you, not we, who said "prank" first  
And as sedateness once a year plays hookey  
And we're alone

*[looking nervously over shoulder]*

and *they* won't know and you won't tell,  
There's something hot your slummy halfgod contacts  
Can fix us up with. Something's going on  
Among the reeds beyond the schoolhouse hedges.  
Here

*[gesturing at business office]*

every racy action comes vicarious;  
High jinks are as atrophied as the word "thus";  
Everything's organized, and "thus" a bore.

SHE: Not long ago you praised your doiled Edens:  
All barbecue and plug-in Arcady.

WE: True. But let's taste just once the unsynthetic  
First Arcady, all bodily and direct.  
Brew us a witch-brew to outjump our skins,  
To live on fresher levels even if brute ones,  
As once delicious panic did where Pan was.

SHE: Passionate in Arcady? For once unvicarious?  
Why, of course. I, illusionist, herb-brewer,  
Reach you this jug of ironies. A gulp is your springboard.

*[WE drink from her jug and bound from right to left stage; i.e., to "Arcady" scenery. During our long hallucinated speech that follows, nothing WE describe—orgy, trampling, or Pan—is really there, except for a single ordinary goat.]*

WE *[to each other]*:

We've jumped to Arcady like champagned corks. Action  
Thrums us like tics. We feel unleashed. We feel  
Nature and naked freedom everywhere.



1

1

# The Rickshaw-Puller

UPENDRA NATH ASHK

Translated from the original Hindi by Krishna Baldev Vaid

ON COMING out of the bungalow of the District Magistrate, Srivastava looked at his wrist watch. He had full one hour to while away; the peon said the D.M. would be back at nine. Srivastava thought of contacting Gajanan in this interval.

He had always tried to kill two birds with one stone. In fact, with certain stones he had often killed as many as four. His rapid promotion, from a petty job of just thirty or forty rupees a month to the exalted position of a deputy collector, in a brief period of seven years, was a proof of his skill in killing more than one bird with a single stroke. And the same cleverness had enabled him to secure a quick appointment in a city like Allahabad after a short stay in the mofussil. The first thing he had done on his arrival at Allahabad was to pay a visit to his boss, the D.M. Unfortunately, however, the District Magistrate had left early that morning to dance attendance on *his* boss, a Cabinet minister, who happened to be on an official visit there from Lucknow. This meant that Srivastava must think of a fruitful way of spending one hour.

Gajanan, an old friend of his, was a lecturer at the University, and lived in Allenganj. He could not have left his place so early. So, Srivastava thought he might as well use this vacant hour in trying to contact his friend.

As he passed by the courts, he could not help visualizing the glory of the not-so-distant future when he would rule the roost in those very courts. The prospect inflated him to the extent of making him stand on his toes, in which uncomfortable position he caressed, with considerable self-satisfaction, the starched collar of his bush-shirt. Then he scanned himself from top to toe and felt further pleased with himself. Just then he saw two rickshaw-men approaching him, engrossed in some conversation, possibly, pertaining to him.

"Rikshaw!"

He shouted with the necessary bossy twist to his voice.

"Yes, sir!"

The rickshaw-men awaited further orders.

"Will you go by the hourly rate?"

"To which place?" asked one.

"Anywhere I please."

"One rupee an hour."

"Ten annas an hour."

"All right sir; come along sir, come to mine," the second rickshaw-man invited him in the famous polite Lucknavi style.

Srivastava hopped into the rickshaw as it came abreast of him. He set his garments right at various places and pulled his trousers up a bit lest their crease should be spoiled. He did not think it safe to sit, with his back against the seat, at ease; the bush-shirt could have been soiled or ruffled. And he was very particular that he should retain his smartness till he secured an audience with the D.M. He sat in the rickshaw as if he had just taken his seat after having shaken hands with the D.M.—he sat bolt upright and tense.

The rickshaw-man was clad in a khaki suit, which was rather unusually clean. He did not appear to be an ordinary rickshaw-puller. The majority of the Allahabad rickshaw-drivers come from the countryside. In off seasons, the hefty villagers from the surrounding country proceed to the city, wearing the rustic home-spun and carrying rations for just one meal. They reach the city in the evening, hire a rickshaw for the night, ply it throughout the night, and with money raised from the fares buy *Sattu*<sup>1</sup> for the next meal. The local betel-leaf-sellers keep this coarse food for the convenience of these rustic rickshaw-drivers along with betel leaves, and the uplifted fingers of green chillies, tucked in those pyramids of barley flour, present an impressive sight. Whenever rustic rickshaw-men can snatch a few moments from their labours, they buy a seer or so of this barley flour, knead it into dough in a plate borrowed from the shopkeeper, swallow it with the help of those green

<sup>1</sup> Barley-flour.

chillies, and push it down with a few draughts of water from the municipal tap.

There is a saying that the jackal runs to the city to meet his death more than half way. These villagers are not very different from this proverbial jackal. They do succeed in earning money enough to pay the land-revenue for the year, after ceaseless hours of rickshaw-pulling, but they destroy their lungs beyond repair in the process.

There is a second category of rickshaw-pullers. These are drawn from the urban workers, driven out of employment after the second world war. Most of these rickshaw-men have been reduced to skeletons; their eyes proclaim consumption, but they cannot leave this work in the absence of any other less suicidal means of feeding themselves and their families in these days of soaring prices.

Srivastava was quite familiar with both these types because he belonged to Allahabad. But this man seemed to belong to a third category of rickshaw-pullers that he knew. A whole lot of demobilized soldiers—sporting a thin Ronald Colman-like moustache and odd garments of the military uniform, have also taken to rickshaw-pulling. Their cock-like looks, stiff backs as they pedal with their knees jutting out, proclaim their descent from the military. These gentlemen ply their rickshaws in a rather reckless fashion, presumably because they are ever absorbed in visions of a third world war which would take them to the freer atmosphere of Egypt, Iran, Italy, Germany, where they would, perhaps, once again enjoy the intoxicating company of white-skinned fairies. Independence has given them a sense of self-respect and pride instead of their previous servility. Most of these people, being but semi-literate, are generally unaware of the distinction between self-respect and crude vainglory. They do not believe in haggling over fares, and look at the passengers in the manner of victors eyeing the vanquished.

But this rickshaw-man, although dressed in khaki, did not seem to be as stiff as the others of his type usually were. His face too didn't have the tenseness of dried-up dough; on the contrary, it had the softness of well-kneaded flour.

"So you were in the military?" Srivastava asked out of sheer boredom and a little bit of exhaustion because of his uncomfortable posture.

The man turned his head a little and said, "No sir! What could I have done in the military?" There was a hint of sarcasm in the man's voice and of extreme disfavour for military life.

"Do you ply rickshaws then?" Srivastava meant to ask whether he was making money by employing some drivers to ply a few rickshaws owned by himself.

"Oh, no sir! I don't own even this one, I have taken it on hire." The man laughed.

Srivastava felt sympathetic to him on realizing that the man was sufficiently cultured. "Why must you do such an exhausting work?" he said. "You know, it tells upon one's lungs. The hard-bodied villagers can perhaps manage it, thanks to their familiarity with still harder jobs, but the townspeople, and I take it that you are one, simply kill themselves doing this work."

"Yes sir! But one can't avoid it either. How can one? One has a wife, three children, mother, grandmother, two widowed sisters. One has no choice, sir, with all this."

"But why not do something else?"

"I can't do anything else!"

"You have been doing this from the very beginning?"

"No sir, only since Independence!" The man stroked his forehead (to bewail his ill-luck) and said, "As soon as the English Officers left, giving place to the native sahibs, my misfortunes began. These native sahibs do not know the value of one's work; they are absolutely worthless so far as one is concerned. I applied to the Government, that, since I would not be able to do anything else, I might be sent to England along with the English. But who cares!"

"What were you doing before Independence?"

"Sir, I used to work in the house of Commissioner Sahib, Duck. I used to get Rs. 50, in addition to a two-roomed quarter and clothes. And if you don't mind . . ." He paused, hesitating whether to say it out or not.

"Yes, yes, come on . . ."

"If you don't mind sir, I would say that the Sahib used to give us bush-shirts which would be any day better than the one you are wearing."

Srivastava felt considerably deflated at this. He reclined against the back of his seat, without bothering about the disarray of his clothes.

"Those were glorious times!" The rickshaw-puller went on, "One would always get special tips on festival days. And the tips were generous enough to provide the needs of the entire family. And now what can one do? How can one hope to get all those comforts and from whom? Hence this life-consuming rickshaw-work. Yes, of course, this will mean sure death sooner rather than later."

"But why can't you find work in the house of some Indian Officer? After all there are commissioners and deputy commissioners even now."

The rickshaw-man once again looked back before he said, "How will these Indian officers pay one as much as that?" And he smiled with unmistakable sarcasm.

"What was your work at the Commissioner's? Were you a cook?" Srivastava was irritated as well as curious.

"No, sir! I will never be a cook! I don't like that work."

"A bearer?"

"Yes, sir, a bearer!"

Srivastava sat up once again.

"That is nothing very special. You could easily continue as a bearer somewhere else. For instance, I have recently employed one bearer!"

"That's all right, but I would not be a bearer of any sort. I never served my sahib at the table. For that work there was another. I only looked after his clothes. Yes, just that."

"I understand what you mean. Clothes, shoes . . ."

"Shoes were done by the sweeper. I looked after clothes only."

"How could you, all the time?"

"Sir, how shall I convince you? I know you won't understand," said the rickshaw-man with a condescending smile. "The Englishmen were remarkable people. They had different suits for different



occasions—sleeping suit, office suit, suit for ordinary purposes, dinner suit, golf suit, polo suit, dance suit, sports suit! And what was my job? To clean these; to brush these, to give these to the washerman; to see that he cleaned these properly; to take these out for the sahib. Now, tell me, sir, can a native sahib appreciate this kind of work? How can he? The poor fellow wears the same suit day after day, month after month, year after year. Take that officer living in that red bungalow. He is a very big officer, but, believe me, sir, I have seen him in a suit that must have been preserved right from his student days. The room where he has his office used to be the ball-room in the good old days when the English were here. Oh! the glorious spectacle it used to present on Saturdays! And, you can see the lawns! How dirty do they look now? You should have seen their glory in the times of the British! And what is true of these lawns is also true of the whole Civil Lines area—it is lamenting the departure of the English. All these lawns and bungalows remind you of close-cropped Hindu widows now!”

Srivastava resented the man's contempt for the Indian way of life. Of course, Srivastava himself was rather fond of living in a grand style. But just then, he was furiously critical of every aspect of the so-called English way of life. With a view to correcting the wrong notions of that man, he said: “There is a world of difference between the English way of life and the Indian one. Our habits—in eating, dressing and living in general—are totally different. For instance, they eat flesh and drink wine; they eat beef and pork with equal relish; we here consider it a heinous sin even to touch these things; their women dance but our women here . . .”

“All this is pointless, sir!” said the rickshaw-man, adding some emphasis to his tone by pedalling still more vigorously. “Ours is a country of slaves; we are like snails locked up within ourselves. We are poor, but we have tried to make a virtue of our poverty by glorifying it. Even the rich among us live in habitual poverty—they have their pile in the bank and lead a stingy life, eating the cheapest food. My sahib used to say that in ancient times when our country was free, in the times of the Aryans, people used to lead a happy life, they used to enjoy themselves instead of economizing. Women used to go about freely and there was no silly restriction on what

one should eat and drink. The sahib used to say that the best use of money lies in spending it and not in hoarding it in a bank. The circulation of money means more work for everybody in the country; it means prosperity. My sahib used to have the furniture and the doors and the windows of the house polished every year. The whole place used to be white-washed every six months. He maintained two gardeners, two bearers, a cook, a washerman and a sweeper, besides being a source of indirect support to the bakery man, the furniture man, the tailor and so many others . . ."

Srivastava was aflame with rage. He would have liked to hammer the rickshaw-puller's servile neck, but the rickshaw was going too fast to permit this manifestation of his anger. He had to be content with expressing it by abusing his British predecessors.

"One need not speak of those swines, they exploited the poor for their own luxuries."

"The poor are being exploited even now." The rickshaw-man turned and smiled with ironical politeness and continued, "The native officers are much worse in this respect; they are all corrupt from top to bottom. The English officers, particularly those at the top, were not so openly corrupt. Our own brothers, on the contrary, are so greedy that everybody is busy in feathering his own nest. The English officers, granting that they were corrupt, always distributed their earnings among so many. These people hoard the money they take in bribes. But it is not their fault; they are not used to decent living. A *dhoti* and a *kurtal*! That's their dress for every occasion. A hair-cut every second or third month! The barber, the washerman, the cook, the bearer . . . all these rue the day the Englishmen left. They can't even make the two ends meet, thanks to the stinginess of these native officers."

Srivastava did all that he could to contain his exasperation, for he didn't want to stoop to a quarrel with a menial.

"You don't need to go far in search of proofs," the rickshaw-man went on, in pursuit of his own thoughts; "take the poor rickshaw-and-tonga-wallahs. Even the richest of our Indians must bargain for a lower fare before hiring a rickshaw or a tonga. I'll tell you of an honorary magistrate who lives in Allenganj. A big man! Owns a press! I always find him waiting at the rickshaw-stand to

share a rickshaw with another man so that he may save a few annas. He will wait as long as the rickshaw-man doesn't get another passenger. On the contrary, an Englishman, even an ordinary soldier, never haggled over the fare; he always paid generously, without entering into detailed calculations. Once my sahib had to go somewhere on a rickshaw, as the car had met with an accident. For a very short distance—he was going from Allenganj to the courts—he gave, can you guess what? five rupees!"

They had reached Gajanan's place. Srivastava climbed down with a jerk. But Gajanan was not in. Srivastava left his card there and asked the man to pedal back to the D.M.'s residence as fast as possible.

As he got down in front of the courts, he looked at his watch. One hour and ten minutes! Normally, Srivastava would not have paid a pie more than the stipulated fare—twelve annas at the rate of ten annas an hour. But he hesitated to pay just twelve annas to this rickshaw-man. He wanted to prove that he was no less a man than those English Sahibs. He said: "It has taken us just a few minutes over an hour. You deserve twelve annas according to our agreement; even if I pay you for full two hours, it would come to just one rupee and four annas. Here are two rupees: You may keep fourteen annas with you as bakhshish (Tip)."

The man saluted him in the military style, and Srivastava strutted off to the D.M.'s residence.

"Well what did you get?" shouted the first rickshaw-puller from a distance, who was still standing at the rickshaw-stand.

"Two rupees!"

"Two rupees ! ! ! "

"Yes, two rupees! Have I ever extracted less from any native officer? You see, I can teach anyone how to handle these silly native sahibs."

This last sentence somehow caught Srivastava's ear. The spring in his gait disappeared, the stiffness of his body relaxed considerably, and he walked towards the D.M.'s residence, perceptibly humbled, looking very much like any other man.

# Misery

KRISHNA BALDEV VAID

Translated by the author from his original in Hindi

"Sleep, my baby, sleep,  
"Oh! Don't weep, my jewel, sleep.  
May I be dead! Don't weep.  
Oh! Sleep, my Shamu, Sleep."

THE LULLABY was choked by a lump in her throat. She wiped her eyes with the back of her hand and repeated several times the name of Rama, her favorite God. Her eyes had moistened many times since their departure from the village.

"Lajo! Quicken your pace or we'll miss the train."

A few steps ahead of her walked Nihal Chand with the other child, Ramu, in his arms. He stopped frequently to exhort Lajo to a faster step, for it was noon and they had yet to go a long way. The child in Nihal's arms was sleeping but he didn't have fever. Now and then he opened his eyes and demanded water. Nihal Chand patted his head, saying, "Sleep awhile more, my son. We shall have sherbet at the railway station."

When they were about to leave, Nihal's mother had said, her one hand against Shamu's belly and the other against his forehead, "If you listen to me, you should stay a day more; the child's body is burning like a furnace. Don't go in this scorching sun." They would have accepted her advice but Nihal's leave was over and Lajo had come even without informing anyone. Already she might have been replaced by another servantmaid.

But while dragging her feet on the burning sand, she regretted their decision not to stay for a day more. The heat of the fierce sun had raised Shamu's temperature. And Lajo felt as if she was carrying a flame against her bosom. The child occasionally started in his delirious dreams, tried to open his heavy-lidded eyes and dropped to the mother's shoulder, his head dangling against her back.

Lajo's eyes burst with tears again and again. She kept on mumbling her silent prayers for the recovery of the child. Suddenly she would start kissing his neck madly; her steps quickened of themselves and she overtook her husband who offered to carry Shamu also if she was tired. She nodded a "no" and lagged behind, again lost in her painful musings, muttering in a stifled voice:

"May I have your fever, child, sleep.  
May you have no trouble, child, sleep.  
Oh! May you never weep, child, sleep."

She tried to push her tears back by feverish repetition of Rama's name. "I shouldn't weep with Shamu in my arms. That is not auspicious." And then her hand would reach out to the child's pulse in search of proof that he was still alive.

It was evening when they got to the railway station. The train was late by several hours. Nihal Chand bought a glass of sherbet. Ramu drank half of it. Lajo refused to take even a draught. Shamu was still unconscious. They sat under a tree on the platform.

"Lay the child down, Lajo, your arms must be aching."

But Lajo did not separate the ailing child from her lap. Again and again she placed her hand on his cheeks, on his forehead, on his belly; again and again she called the child, sometimes by his full name, Sham Lal, sometimes by his pet name, Shamu, and several times by the hundred other names which only a mother can invent. But Shamu didn't open his eyes. A feeble wail sometimes escaped his lips and Lajo felt as if her own life was oozing out.

A few passengers squatted about on the platform. Had there been a woman sitting near, Lajo might have lightened her burden by relating a detailed story of Shamu's fever, enquired about some talisman or for some saint who could cure her child. He had been ailing with this and that ever since he was born.

Nihal Chand was thinking how on reaching Delhi he would go straight to the hospital. He would get someone to inform his office. His boss was good, he wouldn't mind. In case the doctor prescribed some costly medicine, he would raise a loan somewhere. If nobody gave a loan, he would pawn her earrings; she shouldn't

resent it.

The other child, Ramu, looked now at his father, now at his mother, and failed to understand their gloom. He had made many attempts to arouse his little brother. Once he even pinched his cheeks but to no effect on the unconscious Shamu. To his question, "Is Shamu dead?" Lajo had replied so severely that he did not repeat it.

There was only one third-class compartment in the train. They jostled in with great difficulty. "Let me sit, brother, my child is sick." Lajo had to make this appeal to several passengers before she could get a seat. When the train had steamed out of the station they suddenly remembered they had left some clothes—bundled on the platform. Nihal Chand complained a little but Lajo said, "May my child be well and I don't care about anything."

"He has been lying like this for full three days. Doesn't even blink. Hasn't eaten anything. It can't be fever. It is some curse . . ." Lajo was speaking to her dozing neighbor.

"He's younger; the one in his father's lap is elder by a year. But they look like twins, don't they? I know with what hardships we have brought them up. Their father's a chaprasi; I clean people's utensils. But we can hardly manage two meals . . ."

And then Lajo added her earnings to those of her husband, distributed the total over various domestic needs and showed that not a penny could be saved for anything.

"From where can we pay for the medicines, sister? That's why I say, the poor should never fall ill. Only last year he was down with typhoid for twenty-one days. The doctor said, 'Give him a lot of fruit juice.' But where was the money for that? He said, 'Take care of him for at least a month after the fever is gone.' But how could we, sister? He had to go to his office and I to my utensil-cleaning. We had to leave him in his brother's care. How can a child take care of a child? And my Shamu has still not recovered from the damage done to his health by that typhoid. This time also it may be typhoid. What shall we do in that case, sister? They say the second attack is often fatal."

The darkness in the compartment had deepened. The pale



lights seemed to have completely dissolved in the thick black.

"We had gone to the village on an auspicious occasion. We never thought we'd bring this fever from there."

Her neighbor had fallen asleep, her head against Lajo's shoulder. Everybody was asleep, even Nihal. She took fright and kissed her child, once, twice, repeatedly. Perhaps his fever had gone. He was so cold. In a moment, however, all the passengers were startled out of their sleep by Lajo's piercing cries.

"What is it, Lajo, what is it?" Nihal asked anxiously. But Lajo didn't hear anything.

Shamu had breathed his last while she was talking to her sleeping neighbor.

It was past midnight. The din of the train had overwhelmed their cries and the passengers' words of sympathy. Ramu had wept himself to sleep and was now sobbing in his sleep. On both sides of the railway line were vast barren fields, with trees and bushes whirling about like naughty children. There was a deathly silence in the compartment—Lajo's weary wails augmenting it. Nihal's sighs hissed like snakes in the silence.

On a sudden Nihal heard his neighbor saying, "The train will soon cross a bridge."

Nihal didn't understand the intention of the man.

"Under the bridge there is a river."

Nihal looked at Lajo whose cries once again became loud and piteous. His own eyes were full of unshed tears. Many other passengers were now awake. Every one of them was saying the same thing.

"Under the bridge there is a river."

"Throw the dead body in the river."

"It's no use carrying it to Delhi."

Nihal looked at Lajo, dazed and hesitant. She went on crying, without responding to his glance. The train was already on the bridge.

"Be quick, brother."

"It isn't a very broad river."

Nihal Chand got up, staggered to the window, closed his eyes

and threw the child in his arms out of the window. The restraining hand of the shrieking Lajo reached him a second too late.

Nihal had thrown the living Ramu into the river.

## A Year of Sowing

ETHAN AYER

Some lives are deep,  
And some are wide,  
And some are sharp and steep.  
Authority on all these ways  
Is hers to keep.

With nothing of renown to hide,  
With everything to show she comes;  
A year of sowing more to reap  
Is hers a harvesting of days  
Not hers to keep.

She gives them as the gods do sums  
In studied usefulness of pride;  
And if some days are days to weep,  
They are a monument beside  
For us to keep.

# Sorrow for a Midget

LANGSTON HUGHES

**N**O GROWN MAN WORKS in a hospital if they can help it—the pay is too low. But I was broke, jobs hard to find, and the employment office sent me there that winter.

Right in the middle of Harlem.

Work wasn't hard, just cleaning up the wards, serving meals off a rolling table, bulling around, pushing a mop. I didn't mind. I got plenty to eat.

It was a little special kind of hospital and there was three private rooms on my floor, and in one of them was a female midget. Miss Midget—a little lady who looked like a dried up child to me. But they told me (so I wouldn't get scared of her) that she was a midget. She had a pocketbook bigger than she was. It laid on a chair beside her bed. Generous, too—nice, that little midget lady. She gave me a tip the first day I was there.

But she was dying.

The nurses told me Countess Midget was booked to die. And I had never seen nobody die. Anyhow, I hung around her. It was profitable.

"Take care of me good," she said. "I pay as I go. I always did know how to get service." She opened her big fat pocketbook, as big as she was, and showed me a thick wad of bills. "This gets it anytime, anywhere," she said.

It got it with me all right. I stuck by. Tips count up. That's how I know so much about what happened in them few days she was in that hospital room, game as she could be, but booked to die.

"Not even penicillin can save her," the day nurse said, "not her." That was when penicillin was new.

Of course, the undertakers that year was all complaining about penicillin. They used to come to the hospital looking for corpses.

"Business is bad," one undertaker told me. "People don't die like they used to since this penicillin come in. Un-huh! Springtime,

in the old days, you could always count on plenty of folks dying of pneumonia and such, going outdoors catching cold before it was warm enough, and all. Funerals every other day then. Not no more. The doctors stick 'em with penicillin now—and they get well. Damn if they don't! Business is bad for morticians."

But that midget did not have pneumonia, neither a cold. She had went without an operation she needed too long. Now operations could do her no good. And what they put in the needle for her arm was not penicillin. It was something that did her no good either, just eased down the pain. It were kept locked up so young orderlies like me would not steal it and sell it to junkies. The nurses would not even tell me where it was locked up at.

You know, I did not look too straight when I come in that hospital. Short handed—not having much help—they would hire almost anybody for an orderly in a hospital in Harlem, even me. So I got the job.

Right off, after that first day, I loved that midget. I said, "Little Bits, you're a game kiddie. I admire your spunk."

Midget said, "I dig this hospital jive. Them nurses ain't understandable. Nice, but don't understand. You're the only one in here, boy, I would ask to do me a favor. Find my son."

"You look like a baby to me, Countess. Where and when on earth did you get a son?" I asked.

"Don't worry about that," said Countess Midget. "I got him—and he's mine. I want him *right now*. He do not know I am in here sick—if he did he would come—even were he ashamed of the way he looked. You find my son." She gave me twenty bucks for subway fare and taxi to go looking.

I went and searched and found her son. Just like she had said he might be, he were ashamed to come to the hospital. He was not doing so well. Fact is, her son was ragged as a buzzard feeding on a Lenox Avenue carcass. But when I told him his mama was sick in the Maggie Butler Pavillion of the Sadie Henderson Hospital, he come. He got right up out of bed and left his old lady and come.

"My mama has not called for me for a long, long time," he said. "If she calls me now, like this boy says," he told his girl, "wild horses could not hold me. Baby, I am going to see my mama,"

he said.

"I did not even know you had a mama," whined the sleepy old broad in the bed, looking as if she did not much care.

"Lots of things you do not know about this Joe," said the cat to the broad. He got up and dressed and went with me, quick.

"That little bitty woman," I asked him in the street, "she is your mama?"

"Damn right she's my mama," said the guy, who was near six feet, big, heavy-set, black, and ragged. No warm coat on. I thought I was beat, but he was the most. I could tell he had *been* gone to the dogs, long gone. Still he was a young man. From him I took a lesson.

"I will never get this far down" to myself I said, "No, *not never!*"

"Is she very low sick?" he asked about his mama. "Real sick?"

"Man, I don't know," I said. "She is sunk way down in bed. And the sign on the door says, NO VISITORS."

"Then how am I gonna get in?"

"Relatives is not visitors," I said. "Besides, I know the nurses. Right now is not even visiting hours. Too early. But come with me. You'll get in."

I felt sorry for a guy with a mama who was a midget who was dying. A midget laying dying! Had she been my mama, I guess I would have wanted to be there, though, in spite of the fact she was a midget. I couldn't help wondering how could she be so small and have this great big son? Who were his papa? And how could his papa have had her?

Well, anyhow, I took him in to see the little Countess in that big high hospital bed, so dark and small, in that white, white room, in that white bed.

They had just given his mama a needle so she were not right bright. But when she saw her son, her little old wrinkled face lighted up. Her little old tiny match-stick arms went almost around his neck. And she hollered, "My baby!" real loud. "My precious baby son!"

"Mama," he almost cried, "I have not been a good son to you."

"You have been my *only* son," she said.

The nurse hipped me, "Let's get out of here and leave 'em

alone." So we went. And we left them alone for a long time.

That afternoon that midget died. Her son couldn't hardly have more than gotten home when I had to go after him again. I asked him on the way back to the hospital was he honest-to-God sure enough her son.

He shook his head, "No."

That is when I felt most sorry for that midget, when I heard him say, "No." He explained to me that he was just a took-in son, one she had sort of adopted when he was near-about a baby—because he had no father and no mother, and she had no son. But she wanted people to *think* she had a son.

She was just his midget mama, that's all. He never had no real mama that he knew. But this little tiny midget raised him as best she could. Being mostly off in sideshows and carnivals the biggest part of the time, she boarded him out somewhere in school in the country. When he got teenage and came back to Harlem, he went right straight to the dogs. But she loved him and he loved her.

When he found out about 5:30 P.M. that she had died, that big old ragged no-good make-believe son of hers cried like a child.



# *Moby Dick*—An Hamitic Dream

EDWARD DAHLBERG

(For Stanley Burnshaw)

"I never wish to meddle with names that are sacred, unless when they stand in the way of things that are more sacred."

—William Hazlitt

" . . . but from the horror of infernal deepes, my poore afflicted ghost comes here to plain it."

—Samuel Daniel

NOBODY CAN DECEIVE A MAN so well as he can gull himself, and I do not blame anybody else for my own folly. My thought is to spare others, although I know that there is hardly a man in the earth who will take advice unless he is certain that it is positively bad. As for myself, I am not homesick for the fusty books I worshipped as a youth; I am no victim of that most scurrile of all ruses, nostalgia. Let me guard what is sacred, and raze to the ground the stupid, indolent Thebaid of my past because I know Pindar's house will yet remain. I have changed my mind about Herman Melville, for I once loved this Cyclops whose father is Oceanus.

It is natural that we should have a wizened, intellectual literature, and who would want to empty our little Hippocrene, but it is malignant to feign that we are the new Attica of literature. When poeticules assert that Philip Freneau is a bard or that the pages of Charles Brockden Brown are not hellebore to the reader, he is establishing a republic of letters for solemn apes. How much noise is made for a drumbling poetaster or a Thersites of scatological fiction! Let a man, as Rabelais writes, "chew ordure" in twenty novels, and for such coprology he is wreathed in tamarisk as though he were a god instead of a sweeper of privies. We worship size and bulk and the surest way to be accounted a genius is to write the same big, ignorant book many times.

Since we live in a day of tumorous nihilism, we praise the books and the sons of Belial. It is easy to commit such a mistake, but it is a sin to persist in believing it.

Herman Melville, who died in 1891, had been interred by the currish literati. This hapless shade is now the object of the unmuzzled barking of the same Cerberus; this beagle with the gravelled throat always stands at the gates of Hades and bays the moon whenever he scents carrion, dead works.

Canting, stuffed praise of writers is a sort of starved malice; whenever a critic tells such falsehoods about our past he shows his hunger and envy, and instead of providing us with a more opulent Parnassus, he parches the American Elysium. He carries, as Ben Jonson writes, "a commonwealth of paper in his hose . . ." Have we not heard that the seven lean kine devour the seven fat ones: we have a shoal of literary fools who are as blind as eels in turbid water.

Is it necessary to declare that there was not one erudite versifier or prose stylist in nineteenth century America to compare with those geniuses who flourished when London was the fairest Hellas? There was no Mermaid Inn in New York where one could savor a beaker of ale with learned poets; the sepulchral Spouter Inn of New Bedford, whose proprietor is Peter Coffin, was no substitute for the coffee-houses and the chocolate shops in which one might find a Will Congreve, Swift, Pope, Dryden or Wycherley to be a whetstone for his own faculties. Dio Chrysostom said that the father of Achilles selected Phoenix to teach his son the arts of discourse. No matter how charitable we are to Hawthorne, Whitman or to Poe, of what advantage could they be to poor, torn Herman Melville? Ruth could glean more barley in Boaz's field after it had been reaped than Melville could have culled from Poe's *Marginalia* or Whitman's *Democratic Vistas*. Boaz was far more prodigal, but kindness, the father of good thoughts, does not permeate *belles lettres* in the United States.

Herman Melville was as separated from a civilized literature as the lost Atlantis was said to have been from the great peoples of the earth. Neither the Guanches at Teneriffe, nor the Atlantides, knew how to sow corn for the simple reason that they had no commerce with Egypt, Africa and Europe. Allen Tate, in his oracular poem,

"The Mediterranean," has comprehended the sorrows that lie beyond the Pillars and the Sea of Darkness:

What country shall we conquer, what fair land  
Unman our conquest and locate our blood?  
We've cracked the hemispheres with careless hand!  
Now, from the Gates of Hercules we flood

Westward, westward till the barbarous brine  
Whelms us to the tired land . . .

Let nobody imagine that I am unmindful of Herman Melville's scorifying deprivations; he burnt in Puritan ice, but not in woman; God shrive his shade, and may we sin less, for all flesh is error. Our best writers, Thoreau, Whitman, Melville, Hawthorne, Emily Dickinson and Poe, produced frigid works: "... admire and model thyself after the whale! Do thou, too, remain warm among ice," is the admonition of a man whose sorest affliction was that his vitals froze in all latitudes. However, I am concerned with Zeus Asklepios, the healing powers of a god-like book upon the American polity.

There was a dearth of those masculine fiery particles in the Puritan. Aristophanes averred: "By Jupiter, testicles are capital things." The nineteenth century American was still the vassal of that Puritanic Beelzebub, Cotton Mather, the father of the Christian homosexual. What else could be the result of Thoreau's celibacy, Hawthorne's inclement identity, Whitman's ambiguous bachelorhood, or Poe's and Melville's misogyny but the contemporary Pauline invert? Not one of these unusual men could produce a seminal poem or a great confession like St. Augustine's. Born to sin because we have genital organs, we live to confess our faults, and that is scripture and literature.

Man is a tragic animal because he has a teleological impulse to prove that he is reasonable though he knows he is not. Nothing can be proved, and the need to assert that the Archangels Gabriel and Uriel exist is the valor and cosmic energy in the human race. Agamemnon reproaches Calchas for never having prophesied good fortune for him. We would have the right to blame the universe for all our faults did not such a feeble attitude bring us greater woes. One assails a poet who does not feign well. We expect an author whose

life has been foolish, stupid and full of misfortunes to be clever, sage and quick in his books; otherwise poems betray us as much as life does.

The Word is the Logos, which is the domestic white Cock, and the phallus that impregnates the body and the soul. One of the heresiarchs claimed that the Logos was the offspring of Mercury, but the Word in New England literature never became flesh. What congealed works came from those savants! Style is the absolute limit of a man's character and bad writing shows a lack of love; its most malignant symptom is delay. Henry James postponed his periods as long as he could, and Melville deferred action until the last few pages of *Moby-Dick*. Of the 131 chapters, only the last three before the Epilogue are about the pursuit of Moby-Dick, and the *Pequod* is always in the calms. The whaling-craft is similar to Zeno's paradoxical arrow, which, though hurled through space, is at rest in different places. There is no motion in this novel, without which there cannot be any positive affection or heat in the mind. Melville's narrative was unlike the horses of Aeneas that knew when to pursue and when to fly.

A good remark uttered in cumbersome words feebly put together is evil. Not one wise thought can be told without great energy. When the will languishes the demons are triumphant. Whatever one knows comes from the motions of the will. We know ourselves by our acts. Velleity is the principal reason for human perversity.

Sick books beget far more ailing ones just as potently as Abraham begat Isaac, and Isaac Jacob. Moreover, Melville's solitude was, in part, wilful. As Sir Francis Bacon explains: "... those that want friends to open themselves unto, are cannibals of their own hearts." We have been Ishmaels of letters since the republic was established, banished by society. Although poems are composed in sepulchral rooms, for writing is as private as dying, a healthful song is a hymn to the sun, and not as Melville felt, "a dismal stave of psalmody." Seneca's advice is: "It is every man's duty to make himself profitable to mankind." But when the imagination of the writers is ill and distempered, the social corpus is also cankered. Melville's separation from the human race was as deranged as Bartleby's. Melville refers to the seafarers in the *Pequod* as *Isolatoos* who did not acknowledge "the common continent of men." Ishmael, who has "a damp, drizzly

November" in his watery soul, is as boreal as the first Void and as much of a beggar in the winds as Lazarus.

Epictetus, who had all the fortitude of the Stoic, had quite a different view from the author of *Moby-Dick*: "Miserable man, is there any one that maintains himself? Only the universe does that." How many people, who have known the acute pangs of solitude, go abroad to tell everybody that their utmost felicity is in being absolutely alone, a rapture easily attained by simply dying? A nation that is just and strong is a commonweal of kinsmen, and a volume unimpaired by diseased organs and a morose heart is an equatorial friend. "Call me Ishmael," the opening line of the novel, is prophetic, and I doubt that anybody ever composed as true a one. But we cannot forget that in Scripture the hand of Ishmael, a wild ass of affliction, is against every man's, and every man's against his. Montesquieu wrote, "Men born for society are born to please one another."

*Moby-Dick*, a verbose, tractarian fable on whaling, is a book of monotonous and unrelenting gloom. Rozanov once said that he did not care for Jesus because He never smiled; in this respect Jesus and Melville have similar dispositions. Melville is more dour than King Saul and there is no harper in the book to assuage his implacable melancholia. Nobody can endure such absolute and unrelieved misery of the spirit and duodenum except the wailing shades by the banks of the Cocytus. What pierces us is not *Moby-Dick*, but the woe in Melville, "the wild, watery loneliness of his life."

It has been told many times that Herman Melville had an equinoctial identity but that Hawthorne was a wintry prig from Salem. Both were hibernal stylists. Of the two Melville, perhaps, deceived himself the more and on rare occasions to our advantage, as in the line: ". . . the currents carry ye to those sweet Antilles where the beaches are only beat with water-lilies." However, the soft climes that had made his flesh drowsy had turned his thoughts not to Epicurus but to the anthropophagi. The Tahitian experience had not made him averse to the delights of a cannibal gourmet. Let not the Sirens, who praise Melville for the few lovely lines he composed, take you to the isles already white with the bones of a whole generation of admirers of *Moby-Dick*.

Prometheus stole the fires of Zeus to warm the human race;

Ahab's sole purpose is to thaw those frosts within him. How astonished he was when he remarked: ". . . the blood of a Polar whale is warmer than that of a Borneo negro in summer." Hawthorne had disclosed that human coldness is the worst of all afflictions. Giordano Bruno said that not even the snows of the Alps could cool him, but how seldom are April and May in unverdured, mizzling Melville.

"Can one warm his blue hands by holding them up to the northern lights? Would he not far rather lay him down lengthwise along the line of the equator?" asks Melville. "Would he not be moored to one of the Moluccas?" But this North American Lazarus is lodged, not in Abraham's Bosom, but at the Spouter Inn. His bed-companion for the night is not a buxom tavern wench, but a cannibal, Queequeg, "a jolly good bedfellow."

The malady common to both Ishmael and Ahab is unrelieved, warping coldness. Ahab, named after the wicked king who ruled lascivious Samaria, represents a nation that had been bled to death in colonial America, the *terra incognita* of the Pilgrim Lotophagi. Stendhal, mentioning the Americans, thought that "the source of sensibility is dried up in this people."

*Moby-Dick* is gigantology, a tract about a gibbous whale, and fifteen or more lawless seamen, who are alone, by choice, though they are together. Ahab is Adam, Cain, Ham and Nimrod; he is the incarnation of all turpitudes, just as Leviathan is the demiurge and the Pacific is the forest of Nôd; Cain had a beast in the forehead, and Melville writes that Ahab, though evil, has a "crucifixion in his face." In the same wayward vein he claims that the sea is a domestic household at times, and that the sailor experiences a "filial, confident, land-like feeling towards the sea"; Ishmael believes that his bed-mate, Queequeg, furnishes him with ease and connubial comfort.

Melville seems to have taken his revenge against the characters in his book as a reprisal for his own solitude. These seafarers have private, mouldy hearts; at the conclusion of this heavy dirge, Ishmael is as alone as he was in the opening pages of *Moby-Dick*. Sir Thomas Browne, whom Melville read avidly, was of the mind that "there is no man alone, because every man is a microcosm."

Melville's biblical nomenclature is tiresome, too, because it is



a sign of the incurable hypochondria in the entire tome. The owners of the *Pequod* are bloody Quakers, Bildad and Peleg. Peleg in Scripture had divided the earth amongst the first peoples; in *Moby-Dick* the Quakers divided the cash: ". . . it's a wicked world in all meridians." In the place of Ahab, Ishmael, Peleg, Bildad, and the male Cassandra, Elijah, how it would ease our burden of Tyre to have such names as those in the Restoration writers. Give me a clyster after these sea-doldrums and then Mrs. Dainty Fidget, Petulant, Sir Fopling Flutter, Foible, Scrub, Lord Rake and Sir John Brute.

The characters are scarcely limned at all, except gaunt, miserly Bildad "who . . . sat and never leaned, and this to save his coat tails." When Bildad is considering how small the wages of Ishmael should be, Peleg, fearing he might offer him a few pennies too much, tells him to be wary: ". . . thy conscience may be drawing ten inches of water." Melville abhors both Bildad and Peleg—each is a "magnified species of mouse."

Melville is as bloodless as his Quakers are gory. Allen Tate, our most eminent American critic, has this to say: "The evidence of the Blood is one's power to produce it, the power to show it as a 'common thing' and to make it real, literally, in action. For the report of the Blood is very different from its reality. St. Catherine does not report it; she recreates it, so that its analogical meaning is confirmed again in blood that she has seen."

The unmothered, mongrel crew is made up of Nantucketers, sailors from Martha's Vineyard, and the Cape, and whalemens from the lands of Asia Minor and of Hamitic Africa. Aside from Starbuck, Stubb and Flask, the Nantucketers, exsanguious, castaway Cains, who had fished for "crabs and quohogs" on New England's coast, the other main characters, save one Indian from the Vineyard, are Persians, Africans and Polynesians, those hot men at whose hearth Melville could warm himself.

Stubb, a Capeman, is "neither craven nor valiant." This is the rudest paraphrasis of *Revelations*: ". . . because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth." Starbuck, of Nantucket, is a "long, earnest man"; Flask is "short, ruddy, and young." However, Melville cribs the Polynesian, Indian, Parsee and the imperial African in his crusty heart. Tashtego, Indian from Gay

Head, is the "inheritor of the unvitiated blood of those proud warrior hunters"; Daggoo is a gigantic, Negro Ahasuerus; Fedallah, the Parsee, is a mystic. Melville moans over "black little Pip," "poor Alabama boy." Contradicting himself, he also asserts that "Starbuck, Stubb, and Flask were momentous men." We never find out why. The Carpenter is described as having a "ramifying heartlessness," and is a "stript abstract; an unfractioned integral; uncompromised as a new-born babe." Bulkington, who, as his appellation implies, should have dramatic weight, disappears from the book not long after he enters it, and for no tangible cause. Obviously Melville forgot him altogether. Flagitious Ahab is dear to Melville; he is evil, but, his author believed, washed in the blood of the lamb. Ahab nods for over half a century of pages. He is wearying because his sorrow is picturesque rather than active; like Milton's Satan, to borrow from Hazlitt, Ahab's deformity is in the depravity of his will.

Melville took the sea, not fire, the house, the orchard, or the earth, as his element. "With a philosophical flourish Cato throws himself upon his sword; I quietly take to the ship." Marcus Aurelius said, "Always remember the saying of Heraclitus, that the death of earth is to become water." Heraclitus also reported, "a dry soul is the wisest." Thales said water is the original element and the end. The ancients feared drowning more than any other disaster; there would be no quiet for the deceased in those inscrutable, voracious deeps.

This is a Doomsday book about water. The sea is the foe of Odysseus, and the *Odyssey* is the Orphic battle to overcome this moist element or passion. According to Porphyry, Odysseus desired to "appease his natal daemon with a suppliant branch" of the olive tree of Minerva. Homer, as well as the Greeks, who feared the Ocean, which is the cause of Odysseus' desolation, intends to absolve Odysseus in the end so that he can be with earth-born people "who ne'er knew salt, or heard the billows roar." But Melville is the acolyte of Poseidon and not Minerva. "I am, by a flood, borne back to that wondrous period . . . Here Saturn's grey chaos rolls over me."

The Void made God miserable, and He was unquiet until the waters had receded. The Ocean is too close to Primal Nothing, and

neither the Cherubim nor men have composure in water, which is the corrupt kindred of nihilism. In the second book of Esdras, Enoch, who is said to be good, is the ruler over dry ground, and Leviathan over the drowned parts of the globe. Adamah, in Hebrew, is virgin red clay, or as Stanley Burnshaw, the poet, says:

"All thought is clay  
And withered song."

Go to the sea, ye who seek the solace of that immense empty Bosom, the Ocean, and ye shall lament for the teats, for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vine. "Do you know that there is not . . . a tree in de Sade?" is an observation in the *Goncourt Journals*.

Water is a Babel and a confusion in *Moby-Dick*; otherwise, how can we account for Melville's allusions to "sea-pastures," "watery prairies," "Potters' Fields of all four continents," or comprehend "those fabled undulations of the Ephesian sod?" Yet the Deluge is his passion, and he only wrote *justly* when he dealt with the great flood of Noah or Deucalion or the pelagic contents of the universe. The Flood was also for him, as for all early peoples, a punitive disaster.

A plethora of water in the spirit destroys filial affection; Cyclops, who is a son of Neptune and always found on the coast, sins because he cares for nobody, neither the gods nor his parents, save himself, and Euripides considers this his most foul infamy. Whoever sees Cyclops with a wife, children or a brother? Giants are parricides, and if they have a mother or any kin they are utterly dead to them. The Cyclopien sea-ruffians in the *Pequod* never mention their progenitors. *Moby-Dick* is a feral and unfilial book, and the words thereof are the children in Sheol.

Theophrastus was of the mind that moisture in people was the cause of their stupidity. Tertullian, having no regard for the pagan god of the seas, accepts the ancient claim that the dolphins vomit forth in honor of Neptune. In *Moby-Dick* water is less a natural element than a biblical, allegorical substance. Of the four powers of nature, Melville selected the one that grieved his spirit the most. According to an Egyptian ideograph, water signifies deprivation; the Chinese regarded it as a negative element, and Virgil thought it a deceitful one. Homer said that Oceanus was sterile; Ceres cannot

sow wheat here, nor can we find the parsley and the Orphic meadow-land surrounding Calypso's Cave in *Moby-Dick*. Had Melville been an Hippocrates he would have related that sea-water maddens the intellect, makes men splenetic, pituitous and costive, weakens the large, benevolent organs we have inherited from the Angels who lusted after the fair daughters of men, and gives them instead the hopeless aches of androgynes and eunuchs who are governed by Aquarius. The hermaphroditic rarely laughs, for such boisterous noise is pocketed in that bountiful Adamic sac, the testes. In Scripture it is written: "Let the waters be gathered to one place, and let dry land appear." But Melville never departed from the seas to return to the earth.

Melville imagined he had taken the paschal lamb of Christ and covered it with the coat of Leviathan. He cringed when he thought of the "universal cannibalism of the ocean, or unverdured seas," and yet most of his volumes are salt-water folios. A hydromaniac, there was very much more of liquid properties than flesh in his prose style. It was in vain that he heaved forth his pain: "Though in many of its aspects this visible world seems formed in love, the invisible spheres were formed in fright."

What is important is not brit, squid, ambergris, or the chapter on Cetology, but Ham's vice, which is the cry of all waters in man. This is the portent of water in *Moby-Dick*. "Yea, foolish mortals, Noah's flood is not yet subsided." God drowned the earth as a judgment of man, for, is it not written in *Psalms*, "The Lord sat at the Flood"?

The human race perished in the Great Inundation, according to Talmudic Cabalists, because of the intellectual and sexual perversions of mankind. When the Body is false unto itself, the intellect is a liar. *Moby-Dick* is an Hamitic dream; water and meditation are forever married, says the author, and nocturnal visions are damp.

When *Moby-Dick* is not a proem to the Noachim Deluge, it is a lumpish choir of words unjustly associated with each other. Nature never pardons us for novel errors. What we miscall retribution is only the vicious imaginings of our dreams. A man will dream of a sin long before he has committed it, which only indicates that the writ-

ing of *Moby-Dick* was a kind of automatic sleep.

The making of the book took a year; Melville made no corrections, and never rewrote any moiety of it. A novel of over 500 pages is a great hulking hull. The *Canticles of Solomon* are short, the *Book of Ecclesiastes* and the *Song of Songs* a few pages, and how many Hebrew scribes composed and mended these sage and amorous ballads no one will ever know. Who can know all of his errors? Is everything that falls out of the mouth a divine truth? If so, the gabbling women who chase the geese of Camelot are sibyls and canting trimmers are prophets.

In a book of a half a millennium of pages, the adjectives alone are heavy enough to sink the Theban Towers, or to borrow from Swinburne: ". . . the eyes which keep open through the perusal of six consecutive pages must never hope to find rest but in the grave." There is more sorrow in his epithets than in the characters, and moreover the adjectives are made to suffer alike on all occasions, for he had a pelting memory and repeated the same desiccated, gothic descriptions frequently.

Only the insane wish to be misologists, and, assuming that one can, at least, read with a tolerable amount of reasonableness, I find no other way of showing how shabbily written *Moby-Dick* is than by adducing the evidence which is always the "windmills in the brain." What have we of the nature of Ahab but repetitious phrases about his head and mind, which at first may fetch the ear, but later are no more than the specious Elizabethan thunder of a very weary Zeus. The stage roar only deafens us so that all we hear is the monotonous din of surging pages that commenced to roll before the time of Adam, and which do not cease until the readers themselves are drowned in the great Deluge.

At the risk of being a burden of Tyre to the auditor I quote the following: Ahab, the ocean, *Moby-Dick*, and even the *Pequod*, are "moody," "mad," "demonic," "mystic," "brooding," "crazy," "lunatic," "insane," and "malicious." Ahab is stricken, mad or moody on any page that he is mentioned, and this prolix refrain is likely to send a reader to Bedlam solely to hear a raving inmate declare that he is sane. The brows of *Moby-Dick* and Ahab are baked in the same kiln of Moloch. Melville had no understanding of heroical size



in literature, and tried to achieve the epic by hurling hoaxing, hot phrases at the reader: "Give me Vesuvius' crater for an inkstand!" He attempted to convey the impression that he had large, passionate organs. "Hyperbole is the most frigid of all forms of speech," says Aristotle. Eros is said to have thunderbolts in his right hand, and a trident in his left. Cold must couple with cold, fire with heat, and darkness with night; the fat scum of vice is better than unnatural virtue.

Melville was as luckless with his metaphors, that are nearly always awry and have little connection with the thought in the sentence, as he was with his characters. Had he washed his similes in the Pool of Bethesda they would still be lame and palsied. One might say of Melville what Swinburne said of Byron: "Much of the poem is written throughout in falsetto . . ."

His solecisms and hyperboles are mock, dead lava. Ahab's nature is gorged, Homeric fury and is of the lineage of the fabled python of the deep: "the delta of his forehead's veins," "burnt-out crater of his brain," "Ahab's brow . . . gaunt and ribbed," "globular and ponderous heart," "my splintered heart," "the last gasp of his earthquake life," "he burst his hot heart's shell," "the wondrous cistern in the whale's huge head," "his broad milky forehead," "the whale's huge head," "his pleated head," "his pleated forehead," "his oblong, white head." Ahab and the sperm whale are malevolent monomaniacs: "The white whale . . . as the monomaniac incarnation of all those malicious agencies," "Moby-Dick, with that malicious intelligence," "monomaniac old man," "monomaniac Ahab." Ahab, the Parsee and Leviathan are mystagogues: "the mystic-marked whale" and the Parsee's "mystic watch."

I have told you all there is to know about the characters: Melville discloses in fifty phrases, more or less, that Ahab is a monomaniac. This is scenic diabolism; there is more of Ahab in one line of *Hamlet* than in the entire supernatural allegory: Hamlet speaks, ". . . to define true madness, what is't but to be nothing else but mad"; "I am but mad north-north-west; when the wind is southerly, I know a hawk from a handsaw." Moreover, the tragical writers do not repeatedly say how desolate and broken their heroes are.

This huffing tract is glutted with a conflagration Melville could



not create: "the whole grim aspect of Ahab," "he was a raving lunatic," "moody stricken Ahab," "his delirium," "the old man's delirium," "Ahab's full lunacy," "madness sat brooding on his brow," "the whale's direful wrath," "all the subtle demonism of life," "the demoniac waves."

Melville's jadish vocabulary is swollen into the Three Furies, and we flee from them as Ben Jonson in his *Poetaster* took flight from "furibund," "magnificate," "lubrical," "fatuate," "turgidous," "ventosity." For those who are reluctant to believe that such dross is not the customary aliment in this novel, the best advice I can offer is, "Read it yourself, and see."

The atrabilious Ahab is only wicked in the sluttish, supine words with which the author depicts him. Evil is energetic and must accomplish its ends that are just as essential to the Kosmos as the work that good must do. Nobody should resolve to be vile: "See! Moby-Dick seeks thee not. It is thou, thou that madly seekest him!" What is bad will fall out of the soul anyway. Who looks everywhere for trouble? In *Proverbs* it is stated: "A prudent man seeth evil, and hideth himself."

There is no voyage, and there are no more hints of the characters themselves than were given in the beginning of the book. We see Ahab either lying in a hammock when the *Pequod* skirts the howling, wet shingle of Patagonia, or standing close to the mizzen-shrouds, or upon the quarter-deck leaning on the taff-rail. "But in the cautious comprehensiveness and unloitering vigilance . . . Ahab threw his brooding soul into this unfaltering hunt . . ." Ulysses is a wise, crafty freebooter, but the *Iliad* is a regal poem of action, and the poet justly ascribes "to Ulysses, a thousand generous deeds."

Ahab is no less opaque at the conclusion of the tome than he is at its inception; if, as Shakespeare says in *Lear*, "Ripeness is all," then one can say that in *Moby-Dick*, "Ripeness is nothing." Moreover, we are drinking the waters of Lethe, for Melville did not remember whether he was describing the ocean, the *Pequod*, Ahab or Leviathan. "The *Pequod* gored the dark waves in her madness," "great demon of the seas," "all the swift madness of the demoniac waves."

*Moby-Dick* is a rabble of words which could not have been excreted without much travail. Moreover, does one go to a novel to

apprentice himself to a mariner? If this is true, one will be as much a pauper after acquiring the nautical information in *Moby-Dick* as the Greeks were when they returned home following their Trojan victory.

A good deal of bombast has come from the noddles of our intelligentsia about Melville's knowledge of the food and properties of the whale. Contrary to his usual garrulous habits there are only penurious references to these oceanic viands: "Squid . . . is a vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length . . . twisting like a nest of anacondas," "we fell in with vast meadows of brit, the minute, yellow substance, upon which the Right Whale largely feeds," "ambergris is soft, waxy, and so highly fragrant and spicy, that it is largely used in perfumery, in pastiles, precious candles, hair-powders, and pomatum." Ambergris, according to Melville is "supposed to be the cause . . . of the dyspepsia in the whale."

I should mention a few of the chapter titles and charitably refer to them as a bill of lading of a clerkly Triton sitting in a shipping office on lower Wall Street: "The Chart," "The Try-Works," "The Battering Ram," "The Affidavit," "The Quadrant," "The Monkey-Rope," "Whales in Paint," "The Line," "The Dart," "Pitch-Poling," "Fast Fish and Loose Fish."

There is not the scantiest humdrum minutia omitted: "A belaying pin is found too large to be easily inserted into its hole," "The line . . . used in the fishery was of the best hemp," " . . . while the one tackle is peeling and hoisting a second strip from the whale, the other is slowly slackened away." Demetrius rebukes those clodpates on Mt. Ida who "press home every detail as though your hearer were a fool," and Webster writes: "A fantastical scholar, like such who study to know how many knots was in Hercules' club, or what colour Achilles' beard was." Milton reminds us: "What a stupidity is it, then, that we should deject ourselves to such a sluggish, under-foot philosophy."

Do you want natural history? Then let Aristotle, Pliny, Theophrastus, Dioscorides, Buffon, Darwin or Humboldt be your masters. Melville's cetology, the science of whales, is borrowed from a hundred books and *Moby-Dick* is only the lees of other men's marine lore.

Most of his knowledge came from natural historians, and, like the waterwagtail, who pursues the gull until he drops the dung that is the wagtail's principal food, Melville filled himself with the droppings of many volumes on whaling.

We do not study Homer for his nautical information: besides, he knew, perhaps, as little of the sea as Melville did about whaling. One reads Montaigne, Anacreon, Diodorus, Strabo, La Bruyere for pleasure and the intellectual viaticum in wise books. But are chapters on hemp, the pots in which the "hissing masses of blubber" are scalded and recondite nonsense about old Bible prints of Jonah, a whaling Cabala?

When I want to take a voyage, I don't go to *Moby-Dick*, any more than I read Sir John Mandeville's *Travels*—he wrote about the Holy Land and the ancient world without ever having left England. Mandeville's book is a cento of Pliny, Strabo, Marco Polo, and the refuse of sundry Apocryphal Christian works. If you would travel, then go to the Voyages compiled by Hakluyt, or wander through the marvelous pages collected by Purchas, or take rough Drake, or Pigafetta's Magellan as your guide.

However, so many of the borrowed facts about the habits of whales are of no unusual significance, anyway, in a novel or a work of the imagination. I am unable to enumerate the piscatory errors in Izaak Walton's *The Complete Angler*, but I read him for his style, which is another name for perception or wisdom. The thoughts we have are only the words we use. Melville's sentences, however, are always to the windward, so that the reader is worn out by the heavy, ululant blasts of his fraudulent blank verse. Form is the real food of the imagination; facts are the step-daughters of the Muses.

Melville writes: "The previous chapter gave account of an immense body or herd of Sperm Whales," which is gawkish advice to his auditors who, he imagines, could not even recollect a single chapter fifteen minutes after reading it. But how often we reprove others for our own faults. Hesiod thought that Zeus lay with Mnemosyne, who is Memory and the Mother of Muses, for nine days and nine nights without interruption; and it requires that much Olympian, not whale, sperm to fecundate the intellect. Melville had

never gone to Delphi to comprehend the best of admonitions: "Know thyself." A novelist, he had almost no knowledge of people. What we call knowledge of others is what we know about ourselves.

How much more fortunate is his short, but renowned chapter, "The Whiteness of the Whale"? There is the same melancholia in it as in the rest of the novel. Though Moby-Dick is priapic Jupiter, the snow-white bull, white represents death. The Albatross in those "exiled waters" is a portentous wraith, and "the White Mountains of New Hampshire," are "a gigantic ghostliness" that hangs over his gray, hulled soul. "... the White Sea exerts such a spectralness over the fancy." "Witness the white bear of the poles, and the white shark of the tropics . . . transcendent horrors they are." St. John the Evangelist rides on his pallid horse and the fierce-fanged tiger wears the same mortuary vesture, and Lima, a leprosy city of sin "has taken the white veil." "... all deified Nature absolutely paints like the harlot, whose allurements cover nothing but the charnel-house within." Melville concludes this white Golgotha with: "And of all these things the Albino whale was the symbol. Wonder ye then at the fiery hunt?" Of course, he is again paraphrasing *Revelations*: "And I looked, and behold a pale horse: and his name that sat on him was Death."

Compare this with Rabelais, who, grounded in ancient lore, reminds us that the Thracians and Greeks marked their "good, propitious and fortunate days with white stones." Gargantua wears Jovean, white slops trimmed with blue, which contain 1105 ells of phallus, bacon, tripe, roasted thrushes basted with hen-scum and wine. Paris was formerly called, Rabelais avers, Leucotia, in honor of the white thighs of the women there.

When the Archangel Raphael appears before Tobit, the latter announces that there is nothing so good and comforting as Light, which is the raiment of the Cherubim. Allen Tate writes that for Dante "Light is Beatrice; light is her *smile* . . ." Alba, the sacred first town in Latium, was founded by Aeneas where the white sow sat down to rest. Such a legend signifies gestation, the keeping-room and the house, but who breeds porkers or reaps wheat in the Pacific?

Malvolio, one of the scholiasts on *Moby-Dick*, furnishes us with Melville's Notes, which are no less baneful than the brackish sea-

water in *Moby-Dick*: "In Sperm-whalemen with any considerable quantity of oil on board, it is a regular semi-weekly duty to conduct a hose into the hold." In *Moby-Dick* Melville discloses: "But if the doctrine of Fast-Fish be pretty generally applicable, the kindred doctrine of Loose-Fish is still more widely so."

The following citations are culled from the narrative:

... this strange uncompromisedness in him involved a sort of unintelligence ...

To insure the greatest efficiency in the dart, the harpooners of this world must start to their feet from out of idleness ...

[The Carpenter] was singularly efficient in those thousand nameless mechanical emergencies continually recurring in a large ship ...

... this omni-tooled, open-and-shut carpenter ...

... these spiritual throes in him heaved his being up from its base, and a chasm seemed opening in him, from which forked flames and lightnings shot up ...

... crazy Ahab, the scheming, unappeasedly steadfast hunter of the white whale; this Ahab ... had gone to his hammock ...

Here be it said, that this pertinacious pursuit of one particular whale, continued through day into night, and through night into day ...

... little Flask bobbed up and down like an empty vial.

He was like one of those unreasoning but still highly useful, *multum in parvo*, Sheffield contrivances ...

... this half-horrible stolidity in him, involving, too, as it appeared, an all-ramifying heartlessness;—yet was it oddly dashed at times, with an old, crutch-like, antediluvian, wheezing humorousness, not unstreaked now and then with a certain grizzled wittiness ...

... however promissory of life and passion in the end, it is above all things requisite that temporary interests and employments should intervene and hold them healthily suspended for the final dash.

There are some enterprises in which a careful disorderliness is the true method.

Is this the "honest manna of literature"?

However, may nobody believe that I would conceal the chants of a man who had enough genius to sing on occasion, but not sufficient strength to write an epical novel. A good sentence or emotion

will come as dear as the cost of dove's dung at the time of the famine in Samaria. Here are some of Melville's canorous lines:

I leave a white and turbid wake; pale waters, paler cheeks, where'er I sail.  
The envious billows sidelong swell to whelm my track; let them; but first  
I pass.

Yonder, by the ever-brimming goblet's rim, the warm waves blush like wine. The gold brow plumbs the blue.

But it is a mild, mild wind, and a mild looking sky; and the air smells now, as if it blew from a far-away meadow; they have been making hay somewhere under the slopes of the Andes, Starbuck, and the mowers are sleeping among the new-mown hay. Sleeping? Aye, toil we how we may, we all sleep at last on the field. Sleep? Aye, and rust amid greenness; as last year's scythes flung down, and left in the half-cut swaths . . .

. . . let me look into a human eye; it is better than to gaze into sea or sky; better than to gaze upon God. By the green land; by the bright hearth-stone! this is the magic glass . . .

There is a wisdom that is woe; but there is a woe that is madness. And there is a Catskill eagle in some souls . . .

Oh, grassy glades! oh, ever vernal endless landscapes in the soul; in ye,—though long parched by the dead drought of the earthly life,—in ye, men yet may roll, like young horses in new morning clover. . . . Would to God these blessed calms would last.

American literature is exceedingly poor in actuals and in amours. Nobody has been adequately fed or loved in an American novel throughout a hundred and twenty-five years. The sailors on the *Pequod* seem as content with biscuit and ship's beef as Cyclops, a part-time vegetarian monster, is with curds and cow's milk. But the Colossus of Euripides prefers a roasted stag, a lion on the spit or gobbets of human flesh. A heathen's collation on the *Pequod* consists of large gammons of whale-blubber. These mariners have the gloomy, Phrygian throats of Bacchanal nymphs who milked a lioness and made cheese of the milk. Melville knew no subtler delicacy of the table than strawberries swimming in the milk of the sperm whale. The author thought that "brains of a small Sperm Whale are accounted a fine dish." "The casket of the skull is broken into with an axe, and the two plump, whitish lobes being withdrawn (precisely resembling two large puddings), they are then mixed with flour,



and cooked into a most delectable mess." "The imagination is wounded long before the conscience" is a wise thought from Henry David Thoreau.

What wry joy does this descendant of Ham and Polyphemus, perverse in all of his appetites, take in telling the reader of those profane, Polynesian meals of human flesh: the barbecued heads that had been decapitated by cannibals in Tahiti "were placed in great wooden trenchers, and garnished round like a pilau, with breadfruit and cocoanuts; and with some parsley in their mouths." Aristotle advises the poet that not everything can be divulged, or offered for public view "lest Medea murder her children in front of the audience, or impious Atreus cook human flesh in public."

Whose gorge is not qualmish as he witnesses Stubb eating his "spermaceti supper" as "thousands on thousands of sharks" are swarming round the dead whale roped to the *Pequod*. What froward humor there is in Melville when he places before the reader "a meat pie nearly one hundred feet long" made of the innards of a whale. The Psalmist declares that Leviathan will "be broken into pieces, and given as meat to the people inhabiting the wilderness." So much blubber gives one indigestion for "the rest of his reading days."

Unclean feeders are not the vassals of Aphrodite. Solomon's bed is as spiced as the Moluccas, Rabelais' belly cannot be filled with the purgatorial loaves of the ocean, or his tragic thirst slaked by seawater. "I moisten my gullet, I drink, and all for the fear of dying."

Contrast these morbid and unhealthy disgusts with the "belly-munitions" of Sancho Panza, the gustatory passages in *Volpone* or *The Alchemist*, or several hundred pages of Athenaeus on delectable viands and loaves baked in frankincense. My soul pants for a river, a heart, a crust of bread.

There is no doxy, trollop or trull in any of Melville's volumes. He had no likerish palate; even chaste Spenser would allow the desolate tribe of males the solace of "Her snowy breast was bare to greedy spoil." Moreover, who, after such an incubus, does not pine to hear the sound of her petticoats, the sweet, nourishing sight of her licentious skirts. After considering the intricate intestines of a sperm whale, as Melville advises us to do, I am as ready as Holofernes to

swoon when I behold Judith's sandals.

Samuel Daniel pined for Delia, Swift wrote memorable epistles to Stella, and the singers in Israel were pierced by those maids who had eyes like the fishpools of Heshbon, but Melville lays bare the beams, the joists, the sinews of a whale. Montesquieu told his friends that the only reason he wrote was to seek favor with the Venuses at court. Herman Melville at the age of thirty, when he should have been an amorist, was as gloomy as John Donne who sat in his shroud after he had passed his fiftieth year.

None can misdoubt Melville's misogyny. The hatred of women is the pederastic nausea that comes from the mention of the womb. Robert Burton, in *The Anatomy of Melancholy*, says that a Muscovite Duke vomited when he saw a woman. Melville, Whitman, Poe, and Thoreau loathed the female, and the first three sages suffered from sodomy of the heart. No more than three generations separate us from Thoreau, Whitman, Poe and Melville; little wonder then that we are now in the age of ice, and that one man in every ten craves to burn in the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah.

Instead of all those spermal ablutions for the pathic, in which Melville said the male should wash his heart, give me the Restoration wit of: "Two years' marriage has debauched my five senses. Everything I see, everything I hear, everything I feel, everything I smell, and everything I taste, methinks has wife in it." "Methinks my body is but the lees of my better being," declares Melville, whose prose was almost disembodied. At Sais the peplum of Isis was never lifted, and in sixteen volumes by Melville no woman is bedded, seduced or gulled, and, by heaven, that is gross deception.

Perversity is the black angel of our century, and the hatred of the clan of females, so deep in Melville, Poe, Whitman and Thoreau, is our Atlean inheritance which we must understand or perish. Eros is the source of masculine life and wit; what there is of gaiety in American letters is either puerile or those few parched, sly conceits in *Moby-Dick* and *Bartleby the Scrivener*.

Melville's "If ye touch at the islands, Mr. Flask, beware of fornication," is a wry imitation of Paul's admonition to the *Colossians*: "avoid fornication, impurity, lust, evil concupiscence." Melville's line is likely to produce a pewed smile, but far better and more jovial is

Rabelais' Bumpkin who keeps the Psalter in his codpiece.

Who wants to chase a Sperm-Whale for over five hundred pages when he can pursue a Shulamite, a Cressid, a dowdy or a shake-bag? Had Herman Melville never been moved by amorous ballads? Can a dolphin, a chine of blubber or the white hump of a whale take the place of the thighs of Aspasia or the rump of Lais of Corinth? This is Melville's phallic song: "Other poets have warbled . . . the soft eyes of the antelope . . . less celestial, I celebrate a tail [of Leviathan]."

Melville composed amorous canticles to an oceanic brute, and the sea was his hymeneal bed. Leviathan is a "luxurious Ottoman," with "all the solaces and endearments of the harem"; the Sperm Whale has a "beautiful and chaste-looking mouth . . . glossy as bridal satins." The pelagic brutes are "unprincipled young rakes"; Leviathan is a "Lothario, like pious Solomon among his thousand concubines."

What else are "the submarine bridal chambers of Leviathan," and all those spermal remedies that he said Paracelsus advised the ill to take to allay their wrath, than epithalamiums. Though Melville could not reject the old Hebrew law of retribution, he had little of that masculine fire in him; Empedokles believed that "in its warmer part the womb brings forth males."

Ahab's solipsism comes from the pride of Narcissus, and there is no hemlock so pernicious as the arts of self-love. Ahab represents moisture, and in the *Psalms* it is "the proud water." "Blind is the man who does not hate self-love," said the author of the *Pensées*. What reason has Narcissus to regard a woman when he finds so much satisfaction in contemplating his own face?

Woman is still the imperial booty of the races, and men will sack towns, capture cities to furnish their courtesans with money to purchase cosmetics and soap, or rape the Sabine virgins when they cannot obtain wives otherwise. Plato knew that nothing was so acute as the pleasures of the body, without which men will hanker for a whale, a dog, a cat, and go stark mad to be like "that lecher that carneled with a statue." Origen horrified the Christian Fathers by castrating himself although they were intellectual wethers themselves. Men suffer either because they have testes or because they have none.

Rather than dissecting the body of one woman, which Balzac advises the novice in amours to do, before he selects a wife, Melville offers the American the anatomy of Leviathan. Here is the cause of Melville's woe, and ours. He wrote a book for men, or, at least, hermaphrodites and spados. I would just as lief reread *Moby-Dick* as live in a volume or a world without any females in it.

Woman is a perfidious creature in *Moby-Dick*, and he cannot refer to Judith or a Cleopatra without giving the impression that it was not Holofernes nor Antony who was betrayed but Herman Melville. In an allusion that has no reasonable connection with the sentence or the chapter he speaks of the gory head of Holofernes hanging from the girdle of Judith. "Towards noon whales were raised . . . they turned and fled . . . a disordered flight, as of Cleopatra's barges from Actium." When Melville writes of Jupiter abducting Europa, his sole interest is in the "lovely, leering eyes" of Zeus; of Europa he says nothing. "By Jupiter, I must not fear a woman," say Beaumont and Fletcher in *The Philaster*.

Melville believed Sir Thomas Browne who wrote that woman is . . . "the rib and the crooked piece of Man," and that "man is the whole world, and the breath of God," which, if true, indicates that there is something amiss in the Lord's respiration. The mariners of the *Pequod*, like Adam, must have been "born without a navel," for none appears to have a mother; all are either unwived or unsocial, despite the few reluctant allusions to those "far-away domestic memories" that afflict Ahab, a "houseless, familyless, old man."

After the blubber-pots and the love-scenes of these corrugated, mammoth Don Juans of the sea, what virile male reader does not yearn for the witty bouts between a smell-smock and a flirt or a sweet bosom that would set Ilium on fire. Whatever Sir John Brute is aching for it is not the Ephesian dugs of a whale, the matrix of a porpoise, or the oceanic marriage-bed of Leviathan. Wycherley's Dorilant has enough wit to penetrate the most amiable feminine heart: "A mistress should be like a little country retreat near the town; not to dwell in constantly, but only for a night and away, to taste the town the better when a man returns."

The Roman virgin sat on the image of the phallus; in Egypt at the time of Philadelphus Ptolmey there was a festival in which the

matrons carried Priapus who was a hundred and twenty-five cubits in length, and that is as long as a seminal book should be. Now that we are prepared to hawk this divine god, Priapus, let us announce that what we are willing to sell, barter, or even give away is, *For Women Only*.

What nature makes us we are; contend with this absolute force at the risk of your sanity. A virile male craves his opposite, and that is nature and habit which are the parents of morals. The wise Rabbins said that the contemporaries of Noah were defiant sinners, and drove the Shekinah away from the world.

At the risk of sowing dragon's teeth, and acquiring another legion of foes whom I have never seen, I must impugn *Moby-Dick* as human literature. What kind of a moral novel is this? Alas, the word, moral, has been the shibboleth of the Philister. That gentle genius, Herbert Read, dislikes this word, and prefers justice in the place of it, but what will prevent the academic Presbyters of literature from preempting this word, too.

Who worships vice, arrogance, or a brute of the salty deep? Since the beasts and demons are within man, what need is there to pursue them? Jesus goes into the wilderness to withstand temptation, but the *Gospels* are gray, plain truths. Moreover, who wants to be worse than he already is? And who would not care to obey Ben Jonson's maxim, "He that for love of goodness hateth ill." Simonides wrote: "Hard is it to become good." Whatever we are, a gnat, a pismire, a maggot, or less, who can be immune, unless he be the dreariest mortal dust, to that rapturous conception of justice in *Deuteronomy*: "Behold, before thy face are good and evil, choose the good." Melville's doctrine of evil is Hebraic and Pauline: notwithstanding this, Captain Ahab pursues the bad, or as St. Augustine relates: "... having no temptation to ill, but the ill itself."

Goodness did not tempt Melville sorely. Pascal says that "Milton is well aware that Nature is corrupt and that men are hostile to morality." Melville, a Pauline invert, remarks: "Bethink thee of that saying of St. Paul in *Corinthians*, about corruption and incorruption; how that we are sown in dishonor, but raised in glory."

We only recognize men's virtues when they benefit us. Moreover,

morals which do not come from a concupiscent nature are a cold wind upon the frail, reedy spirit. He who is in agony because he is not hot hankers for the fabled Apples of Sodom.

Melville was unable to understand St. Paul because he himself was the prey of corrosive velleity. The work of the moth and rust had deprived him of energy, without which morality is a basilisk. "For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh." No one can avoid this battle, whether he be a hedonist or have strong ascetic inclinations, lest he be a viper to his brother and detest everybody for no other reason than his reluctance to overcome his faults. One who has tepid or cold privities can never pardon anybody, especially those whom he has harmed. Worse, he regards the human race as his foe though in his secret soul he knows the real adversary is himself.

Paul confesses in the *Epistle to the Romans* that whatever he had resolved to do, he could not do. This is a clear avowal that would instruct man were he not the only brute that desires to annihilate himself.

It is told that Paul fought with the beasts at Ephesus; but with what sort of clandestine lust was Herman Melville concerned in *Moby-Dick*? What turpitude does he wish to drown in the great Deluge?

Nobody really perceives how vile he is, and the most depraved is he who asserts that he knows he is vicious. A bad person cannot comprehend his own vitiated nature because when the will languishes, the mind rots. Says Seneca: "A man may dispute, cite great authorities, talk learnedly, huff it out, and yet be rotten at heart." But who does not talk as though his heart were not decayed. St. Paul and Pascal spoke simply, never failing to understand that they suffered because they were obsessed by foul imaginings, a truth that Herman Melville never understood.

We are not dealing with Melville's torn, empirical life, but with his imagination, which is the truest experience. Men reveal themselves most when they dream, and *Moby-Dick* is the Titanic sodomite serpent that crept into his dark, blighted heart, never to quit that lair in which the most abominable passions lurk, as we see in his last, homosexual, work, *Billy Budd*.



Though he has been somewhat touched by that dreariest of screeds, the perfectability of man, "immaculate manliness" is what Melville calls it, one can look in vain for a piacular sentence in *Moby-Dick*. So much of our lives is given over to the consideration of our imperfections that there is no time to improve our imaginary virtues. The truth is we only perfect our vices, and man is a worse creature when he dies than he was when he was born: ". . . and Jesus said, Why callest thou me good? None is good." Men cocker their vices, and whatever they do that is good is the consequence of vanity, and thoughtlessness: he is born stupid and dies depraved. Christ sent his lambs to go among the wolves, and Moby-Dick is no lamb.

Ahab does not seek glory but scrapes the bottom of Tartarus and all obscure depths for infamy. The Puritan is a clandestine lecher, and dreams are beasts that come in the night; *Moby-Dick* is the vision of the noctambulist and a furtive, dark trance. Ishmael, Ahab, Daggo, Queequeg, Pip, Fedallah, Tashtego, the detritus of Tartary and Asia Minor, are symbols of nocturnal orgies. Moby-Dick is a primordial animal, and his watery home is the Pacific, which is an Asiatic ocean, for the first peoples came to the new world over this vast stream. Leviathan is one of the Minotaurs, Sphinxes, and Centaurs, which Plutarch thought were the products of the monstrous, incestuous, and ungovernable lusts of man.

Melville abhorred nature, and thought that God was not the peer of the demiurge, who, as one of the Ante-Nicene Fathers held, was the cause of corruption and death. The Gnostics also referred to Sophia as the Spirit and the "Demiurge" as the "Devil." The suffering atheists, or self-gnawing agnostics, who composed the *Book of Job*, had the same conception. Who can accept that spurious and pusillanimous addendum to the *Book of Job*? Though it is good to endeavor to be virtuous, had Job had any other guerdon for his sorrows save the muck-heap? The pedantic gnomes always prevail over the poet whose only Petrine rock is his doubt: How can man, the worm, know whether God exists or not?

The author of the *Zohar* said that before Noah there were only three just men in the earth, Methuselah, Enoch and Jared, and who can forget that Noah is the father of the first sodomite, Ham? Moreover, who has not the most acute compassion for Herman Melville's

ontological pain? Had not the prophet Jeremiah also cried out in anguish: "O Lord, Thou hast deceived us," and does not Jesus in a rueful, gnostical mood lament: "Your Father is a murderer from the beginning"? What concerns us is that Melville was a perverted Christian, and that the tawdry writing in *Moby-Dick* is to some extent wilful self-hatred. Is there a genius in Christendom whose holy screed is not: "In the beginning was the Word"?

Herman Melville had committed sodomy, as it is meant in the *Old Testament*; in his mind he had had connection with a beast of the deep. Take woman from man and he will yearn for an angel, a porpoise, a whale. This starveling became a hunter for profane and nether flesh, dolphins, sharks, leviathan and man, whatever could ease those clinkered, lava lusts. Unable to be consumed in the flames of Troy for Helen, he was cindered in the fires of Sodom and Gomorrah. Read his last work, *Billy Budd*, a piece of inverted mariolatry, for it is the virgin boy, Budd, the name of a maiden, who is his Mary.

The only real marriage in the book is between Queequeg and Ishmael. "He pressed his forehead against mine, clasped me round the waist, and said that henceforth we were married." "No place like a bed for confidential disclosures," and this is as close to the bed of Venus as he ever comes.

Melville's Christ is "soft, curled, hermaphroditical," "negative" and "feminine." Give us a pagan Christ, in part Apis and Mnevis! Why does Jesus wear a loin cloth? The women at Pompeii substituted the cross for the image of the phallus they had worn around their necks. The crucifix hangs against the fertile paps of the Catholic virgin, and what natural woman carries the image of a man close to her carnal bosom without sensual pangs? We must cast out such diabolical conceptions of goodness, as the Lord himself "opens the kingdoms of heaven to eunuchs," and "it remains, that they who have wives so be as if they have not" or there will be a universal Sodom and Gomorrah.

Though Melville abhorred Christianity, he wrote Puritan gospels in Tophet.

Melville is an Ophite and his supernatural whale, "the starry Cetus," is a species of Dagon, the fish-like deity of the Philistines.

The whale, though a mammal, was a great fish and a serpent to the ancient fabulists, and Christ is a moist star—Jesus is Pisces.

Leviathan in the *Zohar* is feminine. The Leviathan, the oldest foe of man, is called Rahab by Isaiah and the Psalmist—the Dragon and the serpent. "Thou hast broken Rahab in pieces," and "Art thou it that hath cut Rahab and wounded the dragon," both of which come from Isaiah and refer to a feminine creature, and is not Rahab also the whore of Jericho? Elohim, too, is often feminine in the *Cabala* and in Gnostic theology. Proclus in the *Timaeus* believed that "Nature is suspended from the back of the vivifying goddess." The female part of God was known as the Shekinah to the cabalistical thinkers. Clement of Alexandria writes that the symbol of the Bacchic orgies is a consecrated reptile and also that the name Hevia, or Eve, signifies a female serpent.

But for Melville, a superstitious scientist, or a Talmudic one, the pelagic Demiurge is masculine. His mammoth, in part, is one of the "monsters of Rahab" of the olden Rabbins; Leviathan is Tiamat of the Gilgamesh epic, the dragon of Isaiah, the Psalmist, Job and Enoch. *Moby-Dick* is a hybrid of Scripture and zoology, and this brute of the sea is the product of the "half-foetal suggestions of supernatural agencies." Thomas Traherne wrote that "to call things preternatural Natural is Monstrous."

Osiris, the personification of the generative organs of man to the Egyptians, was second in importance to Isis, the begetter. She is the Ancient One just as God is known as the Ancient of Days in the *Book of Daniel*. It is Isis, the goddess, and not the aboriginal hermaphrodite, masculine in front, but feminine in the hinder parts, who is searching all the waters of the Nile for the genitals of her consort. Did she find them, or are we men with only a tithe of a prepuce?

However, it is the spermal deity Melville worships, not the Generatrix, as is apparent in one of Melville's extraordinary raptures: "In thoughts of the visions of the night, I saw long rows of angels in paradise, each with his hands in a jar of spermaceti." Of the sperm Melville writes: "I washed my hands and my heart [in] it."

Spite of the fact that the novel is a doxology of a wicked beast of the seas, Melville believed in punishment, for the *Pequod* is a

"whited sepulchre" on the outside, but full of "dead men's bones within." Furthermore, in the *Cabala* it is explained that the human race perished, save Noah and his family, by drowning. But why was homosexual Ham spared, and does not Melville follow the same parable since all die by water save Ishmael, who is really Ham? And the universal Hamite is grum, aqueous and froward.

*Moby-Dick* is Christian zoolatry, a Puritanical bestiary, and in some respects, not dissimilar to the Egyptian *Book of the Dead*. Philo Judeaus had rebuked the Egyptians for their idolatry of crocodiles, dogs, the ibis, and cats. In olden Cairo superannuated cats were fed in charity hospitals. One cat in a house is a sign of loneliness, two of barrenness, and three of sodomy. *Moby-Dick* is the bestial *Bible* of modern Ham.

The dark races awakened his concupiscence: is not Ham the Father of Africa. Melville called his seafarers mermen. Only dark or olive flesh stirred in him the ashes of Borsippa, Ur and Canaan. Ham is also the father of Canaan who is the primal forebear of the Canaanites who were destroyed because of their terrible wantonness. The "imperial" Negro Daggoo was his phallic idol, and the name was obviously derived from Dagon, a god with the tail of a fish. There were Tashtego, black Pip whom he fondles, and Fedallah the Parsee who is the only one before whom Ahab stands in awe. Water is vice, retribution and Ham, and the spermal whale is Priapus who has deprived Ahab of his phallical leg. As Fedallah is drowning, Ahab, for no overt cause, moans for the "unforgiven ghosts of Gomorrah." The words in the soul rise to the lips on a sudden, because no lust can sink them. Ay, it is a dry, dry book in which a man can drown all his sins.

These are seafaring Nimrods; Nimrod is the hunter whose iniquity is his pride, and the *Pequod* is a Babel, as Melville shows in the chapter "Midnight, Forecastle"; it is the Tower of Hubris on the watery plains of Shinar.

Since we are as bad as our dreams, and our books are no better, it was inevitable that Melville should have had Cyclops' anthropophagous palate, and that after *Moby-Dick* he should have written *Pierre*, a novel about incest. Those meager sentences that are supposed to be cetology in *Moby-Dick* are very close to quack erudition

because there is a failure in sensibility and a drought of the organs of the body. We can only write well about our sins because it is too difficult to recall a virtuous act or even whether it was the result of good or evil motives, or just an accidental deed.

There is now a pederastic hagiography composed of people who prefer the bad to the good, who like excrements instead of pond-apples, sumach, dogwood, or hyacinths, and who choose men rather than women to be their paramours. Intellectual sodomy, which comes from the refusal to be simple about plain matters, is as gross and abundant today as sexual perversion and they are nowise different from one another. This kind of pathic in literature has waned, epicene affections. A misologist, he takes ophidian pleasure in the misuse of words, and his sacerdotal gibberish sounds more like the cries of animals than the holy Logos or the alphabet of the god Thoth. Specious rebels, they are the advocates of the rabble arts.

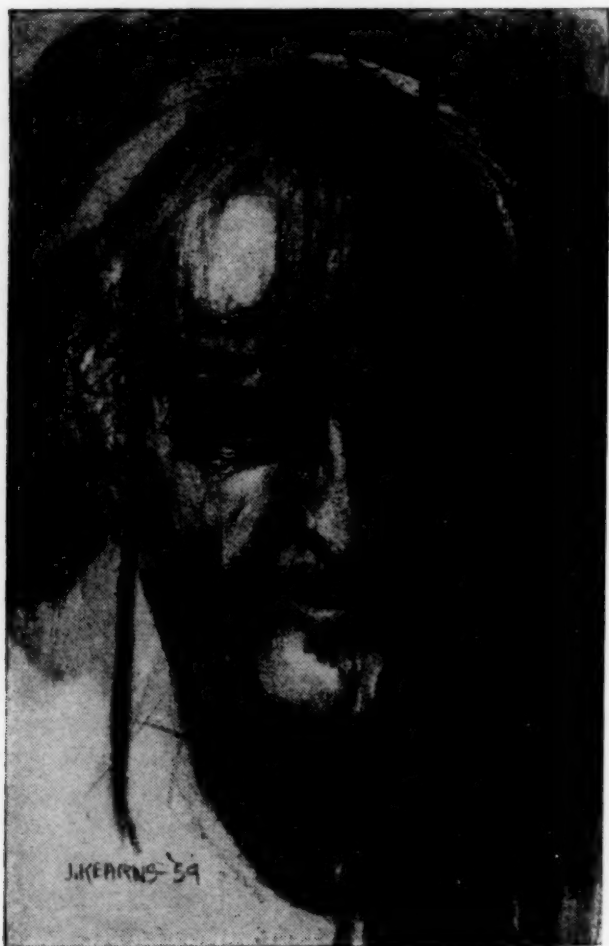
The martyrology of the sodomite consists of Saint Ordure, Saint Incest and Saint Matricide. The inverted Christian eremite nowadays has a matricidal heart, and is either totally separated from his parents, or utterly detests them. How feeble is the image of the father in nineteenth century American literature; had Poe any parents at all? What do we know of Melville's male progenitor, or Whitman's, and was the great savant, Thoreau, born of stocks and stones? The misogynist spawns the homosexual, and *Moby-Dick* is the worship of the male sperm. Phallic idolatry is the concern of women, and no literature can be bawdy, human and sage unless men love women; no nation can survive, not Hellas nor Jerusalem, when the stewards for males are substituted for the hetira and the olive-complexioned damsels who were the solace of the harper and his son, the Amorist Solomon.

I wish to make some mention of numerology in *Moby-Dick*, for it is an allegory of a perverse Puritan unable to disclose his turpitudes except by symbols which are the twenty-two cabalistical letters of the Dream. We learn by accident and later reflection what ails this Hagarene author. Dreams have their own surf and neap-tide which bring ashore what lies at the watery bottom of depraved nature. Adam, Cain, Ahab are glyphs that represent perverted lust.

It is easier to decipher the hieroglyphs on the Pyramids than it is to comprehend *Moby-Dick*.

There are seven vessels that the *Pequod* encounters, one of which is the *Rachel*, and the other the *Virgin*, and that is as close as the author ever comes to Nausicaa or to the bedmate of Jacob—Philo

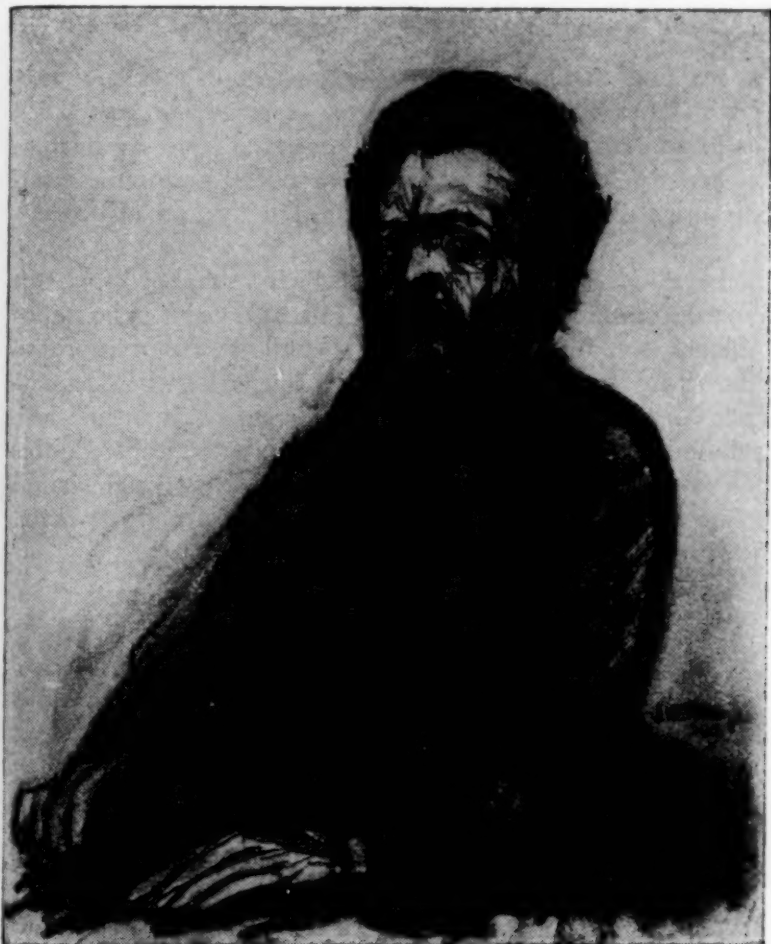
EDWARD DAHLBERG, drawing by James Kearns





Judeaus defines Jacob in Hebrew as the performer. Sheol in the *Cabala* consists of seven parcels of darkness. St. Thomas accounts for seven Archangels. The name, Ishmael, has seven letters in it. Seven or four in *Moby-Dick* represents the Satanic numerology in man's evil night.

HERMAN MELVILLE, drawing by James Kearns



Forty is also an abstruse number in Scripture and in this novel. Ahab's punishment is to be forty years at sea, and in *Deuteronomy* the malefactor receives forty stripes for his wickedness. Ahab reiterates the figure forty several times in his lachrymal speech before he drowns. Doubtless, Melville had in mind that the Jews were forty years in the wilderness, that Moses was on Mt. Horeb with God forty days and nights, and that Christ resisted the temptation for forty days. All, save Ishmael, were punished by water, as was the homosexual generation of Noah. Since water is the nemesis of all the characters in *Moby-Dick*, it is significant that the Deluge lasted for forty days.

Adam, Cain and Ahab are four-lettered words and now associated with what is libidinous. Queequeg, Tashtego and Moby-Dick are composed of four letters or double four, which stand for the male sperm. Fedallah, which consists of eight letters, means the same. Forty is a sign of retribution, and Noah is punitive, proud water.

Melville wrote a Scriptural legend which he soaked in whale's gore and the sharkish "waters of Noah," but who wants to be locked in a blubber-room for a whole novel? Though the author assures us that the whale has no ill smell, who any longer has the Christian fortitude not to put rue in his nostrils? If *Moby-Dick* is an epic, as is alleged, I prefer then the smaller sins of flesh. The critical credo that obtains today is that if a book is obese and heavy enough, it is a masterpiece. Several hundred barrels of whale-oil are not as heroic as one drop of Sarpedon's blood for which Zeus wept.

# Montreal

EARLE BIRNEY

## I

This is New France, the oldest France alive,  
where Church is more than state and less than stock exchange,  
where some men eat with taste and guiltless wine,  
are courteous in streets and laugh with ease,  
our only City and our largest slum.  
Here poets own a press and print unread,  
art bares the mammalled hills but not the bosom  
and Butler's naked Greek is cloistered still.  
For Hochelaga's palisades, the British wall in Westmount,  
the isle within the isle, of language and illusion,  
bifocal signs in streetcars, in politics and hearts,  
*défense de crâcher* and *défense d'unifier*,  
two roads to nationhood, to knowledge, and to Christ.

## II

From the bark of the birch canoe  
crawl trains like sepia centipedes  
across a webbed St. Lawrence  
while freighters leech the river's greying arms.  
The dome of copper mushrooms from the hermitage  
and painful as crippled ants the pilgrims  
kneel up concrete flights to God.  
But higher still above the climbing crosses,  
above the convent and the lubberly college,  
the oratory and the *Oratoire*,  
shoot factories' cannon and the railroads' palaces.

## III

Where the medicine man died of measles,  
the pioneer of the arrow,  
drive now the pale psychiatrist and priest.

Here Bretons uprooted the wigwam,  
planted the manor and cabin,  
reap weedy disorder of roof.  
Swapped for the beaver and fox  
washlines and rusty backstairs,  
and a perch in the cage of St. James Street.  
The Iroquois *auto-da-fé*,  
the stocks in the Place d'Armes,  
traded for pilloried wills and the brand in the brain  
that stamps the whole world kin.

## IV

The trapped Lachine treads out its life  
to power Champlain's tinselled cross,  
illuminate the lovers and the tycoon's Gothic.  
The Huron scalp-lock and the powdered wig  
dangle on museum walls,  
the skier prices manufactured *tocques*  
and on St. Catherine's Street fedoras cover all.

## V

What would we choose again, were we the choosers?  
The carriage's wheel cutting the moccasin print,  
or a ring of rust under the Cadillac's highway?  
Trail and tree and raddled tepee  
or precise décor of transformers?  
The pinkchecked *coureur de bois*  
clutching swift death in the rapids,  
or the seigneur's younger sons  
placidly aged in the pulpmill?  
From methane and the mind  
a firewater is distilled  
and drunken all we pay our *cens et rentes*  
alike to foreign usurer or French;  
the Norman conquerors with *soutane* and *crèche*  
an isle of sand between the global tides.

## VI

And who has time to audit history's books,  
the belching I's, the scarlet zero mouths  
of ladies like sweet cockatoos on Sherbrooke,  
the liquid integers *des concerts symphoniques*,  
St. Henri's bleak arithmetic of wages, and the X,  
the unknown quantity of faith against the sky?

## North of Superior

EARLE BIRNEY

NOT here the ballad or the human story,  
the Scylding boaster or the water-troll,  
not here the mind; only the soundless fugues  
of stone and leaf and lake, where but the brutish  
ranges, big with haze, confine the keyboard.

Barbaric the clangour of boulders, the rhythm of trees  
wild where they clutch the pools, and flying with flame  
of their yellow sap are the stretching poplars of May  
running arpeggios up to the plangent hills.

The horseman icecap rowelled the only runes  
and snow-wild wind these cochromes upon  
the raddled rocks that wear the tarns like eyes  
within their saurian skulls. O none alive  
or dead has cast Excalibur into  
these depths, or if some lost Algonquin wooed  
a dream that came and vanished here, the breeze  
today shakes blades of light without a meaning.

Unhaunted through the birches' blanching pillars  
lopes the mute prospector, through the dead  
and leprous-fingered birch that never led  
to witches by an Ayrshire kirk nor wist  
of Wirral and a Green Knight's trysting.

Close march the spruce, and "fir that weepeth ever,"

the wandering wood that holds no den of Error.  
Silently over the brush they lift their files  
and spear forever together the empty sky.  
Not here the rooted home but only discords  
the logger sounds, tarpaper shanty scored  
with lath he deeds next year to squirrel and spider,  
and little wounds upon the rocks the miner  
makes and leaves at last to mending snow.  
The wood returns into its soil, the caribou  
are blurring hoofmarks in the scrub, grey wolf  
and man make flickers on the long horizon.

This world that is no world except to hunted  
purblind moose and toned deaf passing hunter  
yet skirls unheard its vast inhuman pibroch  
of green on swarthy bog, of ochre rock,  
and the wine that gleams through the spectral poplar's bark.  
Not here with hymn and carol blessed, Titania's  
night, nor will this neuter moon in anger  
pale for vanished rites or broken bough;  
for nocturne, hypnosis of lynx and owl.  
No heart to harden or a god to lose,  
rain without father, unbegotten dew.

See where the unexorcized dragon, Fire,  
has breathed unwieldy lances from the wilds  
for wars already waged, and planted one  
charred pine to fly a pennant still, a husk  
of golden needles—yet no mute or glorious  
Milton finds Azazel here, no Roland  
comes to blow defiance by this serpent stream.

No sounds of undistinguishable motion  
stalk the guilty poet flying, only  
silence where the banded logs lie down  
to die and provender the luminous young;  
the swordless rock, the heavenless air, and land  
that weeps unwept into an icy main  
where but the waters wap and the waves wane.



# The Poem That Can't Be Stopped

PAUL ELUARD

Adapted from the French by Walter Lowenfels

"The resistance movement gets going  
anywhere a decent person exists."

—Tristan Tzara (*L'Antitéte*, 1933)

"I dedicate these pages to those who won't  
get them and those who won't like them."

—Paul Eluard

Sleepers naked beyond their flesh  
Sublime choice that leaves them alone  
Profound angle that morning uncovers  
Flesh rippling with fresh highlights  
First rulers of the day  
Enchanting each other by the passion of being alive  
The colors orange rose blue  
The words lovely charming darling  
Lying as if they were standing  
The loving touch that opens up their real selves  
Shining together in their difference  
Separating laughing at their own enchantment  
Coming together like diamonds  
Silent secret in their hiding place  
Blind unrestrained explosion  
Mixing blood with grass and roots  
And savage obscure chants  
Lighting up sunlight  
Melting into flowers and caresses  
Quiet incredible experts  
At being faithful to stars  
Torsos breathless with flaring  
Spasms nothing can stop  
On the road built of glass

To the world's most populated peak  
Barriers guard and contradict us  
Leveling out to a load of lead  
That won't be swerved and doesn't even say Excuse me  
It's over. The surprise is not surprised  
The darkness is ashamed of having been lit  
Are there two of us or am I by myself?  
Like a woman all alone  
Cutting out pictures  
    Trying to say something  
Out of nothing  
    Looking for signs ahead  
The year might have been a happy one  
    Summer locked up  
Winter snow fresh as a new-made bed  
As for spring we freed ourselves  
    With beautifully made wings  
Coming back from death and life  
I travelled from June to December  
Through a mirror that doesn't care  
How thin our eyesight is  
Like a woman all alone  
Shall I stay here in the dumps  
Or will I find the answer one day to everything  
And not tell anybody  
The walls weigh down all the doors and shut them  
The weight of trees gives body to the forest.  
Rain lifts its verticals to the sky.  
What's that red that looks like blood darkening?  
The sun is born on a slice of fruit  
The moon rises on the tip of my breasts  
The sunlight races across the dew  
The moon cuts off its own shadow  
The truth is that I was in love  
And the truth is I am in love

Day after day love gets me first  
I'm not sorry I forget all about yesterday  
And that I won't make any headway  
In somebody else's language  
It's time that gets me first  
And love hasn't got the time  
To draw plans on the beach  
That get blown away by a breath of wind  
I am talking half words to the air  
But I understand myself  
This getting-up sunrise where last night's blue is laughing  
With a tender little smile  
My beautiful child of this morning  
That nobody sees  
My mirror is out of whack  
With all other mirrors  
A corner of it is lost  
My love finds it  
Nothing can disorganize the order of my light  
Where I am completely myself  
With whatever I love  
On the table  
This cup of water this piece of bread  
Makes peace with my hands washed in fresh water  
Weaves us together my hand and the bread  
The waters of the earth and the warmth of the fresh bread  
Meetings on both sides of the morning  
Today's light has never been before  
Today we are today's children  
Transforming our lives into light  
Without yesterdays or tomorrows  
Today is what we dreamt last night  
In this beautiful day everything is spelled out  
Today I am alive forever  
I am the first one here the only one who never stops

Nothing theatrical about it just my eyes  
In a dream of being opened  
My body is my best bet  
Multiplying everything I can see  
I am my own mother my own child  
Each minute lasts forever  
My flesh gets clearer and darker at the same moment  
I bring along my own ray of light  
And my own night-long happiness  
Every word speaks the truth  
The mud is making love  
Melting into spring  
The sky is getting down to bed rock showing up death  
The evening wakes up in the morning after a hard day  
Man who squeezes clarity from a rock with his eyes shut  
His eyes opened by lightning  
Mortal and breakable bleeding with hope  
Man on the hilltop of what's gone  
Always sorry about something  
Stripped to the bone held to account  
For learning how to grow old for knowing how to pass the time  
For knowing how to rule and how to last and how to come to life  
again  
He chucks back the bedclothes lights up the room  
Opens the scratched mirrors of his youth  
And the long road that took him back to it  
To be a child born with a feather  
Always the source you can see through  
Always a pure heart with a drop of blood  
A drop of fire always relighting itself  
Swallow your laugh my innocent chew up your own life  
Nothing changes your innocence nor switches your passion.  
In the winter I have my own sun that makes blossoms out of snow  
The summer scents all my weaknesses with flowers  
Everyone will love me because above everything I want all things

to be right  
And I am ready for anything for the future of everyone  
I don't know a thing about the future  
But I love to love and some day it's going to kill me.  
He got down to his knees for one first kiss  
The night was just like every other night  
And that was the beginning of the end of the past  
The bitter taste of what he had lived  
Then he woke up all the sleeping dreams  
It was the cold grey ash of a silent hush  
The blind ash of sterility  
The day without hope and the night without sleep  
Sharing the hunger of little people  
All words repeat themselves  
And so do tears  
In the strength you have lost  
And the power you dreamt of  
Yesterday you were young a man with a future  
Let just one kiss keep her safe  
And hold her with nothing but happiness  
Like a ray of summer that turns blue into white  
Just so everything for her adds up to pure gold  
With her throat rippling like a fawn  
And her flesh gathered by the summer heat  
Toward a caress that never ends  
Let her be just like prairie grass  
Stripped clean to the roots for everyone to see  
Or like a sun shower that pours out magic without a cloud  
Or a rain that drops straight down between two forest fires  
Or a tear that drops between two smiles  
Or let her be like snow that utters hallelujahs softer than the wing  
of a bird  
When the heartbeats start to rush  
Through the veins of a fresh wind  
Let her eyelids open up

To see what the light is really saying  
And become the complete essence of herself.  
I want her lips and the silences nobody translates  
To understand each other

And have the palms of her hands  
On every forehead the moment they wake up  
Let the lines in the palms of her hands

Continue in other hands  
To distances beyond time

I am building up to my climax

From the ocean bed to the river source  
From mountains to plains  
The shadow of my life

Races the dirty shadow of my death  
But between us a new morning  
Is being born from our flesh  
Just the right way

To put everything into shape  
We are moving just the right foot step ahead  
And the earth says hello to us

The day has all our rainbows  
The fireplace is lit with our eyes  
And the ocean celebrates our marriage

Everybody alive is just as we are  
And we are in love with them

The others are imaginary zeros  
Surrounded by their own non-existence

But we have to fight them  
For they live by stabbing us in the back  
Their talk is like a broken chair  
Their lips palpitate with beatitudes

With echoes of ancient bells  
And the silence of black gold coins

A heart alone is not a heart  
Until it is one with all hearts



And your body is every star

In a sky full of stars

    In the orbit of a movement

From your eye to all eyes

Gleaming with a patina of loveliness

    Whose light is the weight of the earth

To sing over all human seas

For you the living body I love

And for all those whom we love

Who don't want anything but to love

I'm going to wind up by closing down

On dreams we have by ourselves

I'm going to wind up by finding myself again.

Together we take over the world

I'm alive and laughing

    A sprig of asparagus lights up the earth

I hear songs from throats that never stop singing

    And see hands washed clean of bloodstains

Innocence is an act you give away for nothing

You get back happiness in victories over dry rot

And heat out of winter's driedup ash

Fresh summer air sifts out of new flowers

Your love is a constant multiple of everything naked

Nothing to hate nothing to forgive

No blueprint of tomorrow in our eyes

In a storm even our weakness

    Is a compass that makes sense

Ahead always a more perfect kiss

In that dot in space where we belong

    On the horizon of our time

A couple of stones on a beat-up road

Some leaves of grass that somebody remembers

A sky covered up a night that moves on

    A few window panes trying out their lights

Knotholes in a door next to a window

    Opening on people who are locked up inside

A little tap room that is sold and resold.

The apotheosis of statistics

And a nightmare of dirty hands

A profound disaster

Where everything is weighed

Even our unhappiness

Even our contempt

Even our shame

There's no use beefing

Or crying the blues

To laugh is idiocy

The dead end of our droppings gets bigger and bigger

Until it covers everything with its shroud

Eyes have disappeared

Birds fly on the ground

Nobody hears the sound of a footstep anymore

Silence is a mudbath

For plans that have no tomorrows

And all of a sudden a baby cries

In the loneliness of its boredom

And a child pokes in the ashes

Where nothing that's alive stirs

I am giving you the real lowdown

I am being careful about each word

I don't want to kid myself

I want to know where I get off

In order to hang on to my hopes

In the beginning I was somebody else's tears their hangovers and  
their blues

With barely a trace of anything beautiful or good

Pissed off at being in the world

Screwing without love

Got me born out of somebody's misery like the shadow of a murmur

They are going to die

They're dead already

But they live happily forever after  
On the beach of a crystal ball  
Kept going in spite of themselves  
All this is clearer than the brightest sun  
Who's sorry at being part of the world?  
I'm not  
Pity the sabre-toothed tiger not me  
He's gone I'm here  
The blacker and heavier my past seems  
The lighter and clearer is the child I used to be and the childhood  
I am going to be  
And the woman in whom  
I trust forever  
Like a woman all alone  
Tracing maps in the desert  
Trying to say something  
And to see something ahead  
Using all my bag of tricks  
My lures my charms  
Halfway to the answer of my life  
Everything underlined in blue pencil  
Like a woman all alone  
Who has to be one thing or another  
And yet includes all the hundred elements  
I'll learn how to trace tomorrow  
While my hands marry the shape of my own body  
I'll find out how to make blueprints  
While today  
Digs into the muscles of my eyes  
And my love will spread  
The colors of the world  
Over my sleepless nights  
Over nature's bare canvas  
Where I have a corner  
Much grander than my dreams  
Where I am absolutely alone

Stripped to the final definition  
Of what I am

The first woman on earth  
The first man anyone ever saw  
Coming out of the relay race  
Where they got mixed up  
Like different fingers from the same hand

The first woman from outer space  
The first unknown man  
The first exquisite pang  
And the panic of the first ecstasy

The first difference  
That separates brothers  
And the first resemblance  
Between people who are not the same

The first pure snow in the fields  
For a child born in the heat of August  
The first sip of milk  
For a boy born in secret

A drink of roses and thorns  
On a road of dirt and stone  
A flaming sky the heat burns up  
Keeping your head clear  
At a hundred below zero

Rocks that weigh down your shoulders  
A lake shining with fish  
On the unlucky day everything went wrong  
On the ocean covered by one enormous sail

I write to date the years and the days  
The hours and the time that men endure  
And to name the parts of the human body we share  
Which has its morning  
Its noon  
And its midnight  
And then another morning

All inevitable and crossed up with  
The strength weakness  
Beauty and corruption  
The afternoon siesta and unbearable light  
And victory (people wonder if it's true)  
Of a morning born out of a dream of what might be  
The way to make life good  
Including all our yesterdays and tomorrows  
Organizing our own disasters  
Separating fire from ash  
In a house lit by its own light  
Across bridges leading to the dawn  
On a morning when the flesh is reborn  
Complete and breathing with hope  
In a house dripping with icicles  
To look happiness in the eye  
Without pity for your blindness  
Each eye in its own socket  
Rooted in your own self  
Happiness a law of being  
Whose razor edge  
Nothing can blunt  
And it cuts through everything  
Except what has to be  
Our heart is a closed family affair  
With a name that doesn't matter  
Laughing at good news  
In a game where nobody loses  
Ups and downs calculated to the last point  
Everybody wins prizes  
And blessings overwhelm each other  
The bells have gold clappers  
The open fires look out of closed eyes  
At a landscape always growing  
With birdhouses painted in the sky

And the breast you dream of  
    Weighs exactly the right ounce  
And the womb is glad about thoughts  
    That don't have to be thought  
And the fireplace with golden bells  
    Looks out of the depths of your eyes  
Out of the most profound and perfect face  
    And the bird house is painted blue  
And the birds are seeds of wheat  
    Giving away gold to the poor  
So they can fly away quicker  
    Through the silent darkness  
    Of a winter night

It begins with a street  
    A street I am turning upside down  
So that everybody wins everything  
    Including forgotten specks of dust  
And being alone is not to be here at all  
    On a street that doesn't get anywhere  
Where nobody says hello  
    And one day you're with it  
And the next day you are washed out  
    And they all say I never even saw you  
The fog that gets you down  
    With its yesterday's miseries  
That stab you in the heart  
    And the lights in the towers flicker out  
And your blood stream goes dark  
    And happiness is a vanished dream  
Over the edge of an abyss  
    When a great white bubble  
Breaks into a hemorrhage in your brain  
And your heart gets a free ride to nowhere  
    Except the happiness you were promised  
That begins with the two of you  
    The very first word



Already a choral of confidence  
    Against fear and hunger  
A sign of resistance  
Her hand made to rest in mine  
And what's the difference if it's paralyzed  
Her hand makes two hands of my own  
Links everything together frees everything  
Puts us to sleep and wakes us up  
A kiss in the dark tells the human story  
    One body with another  
A night where the earth is part of us  
    A night that begins with your lips  
A night where nothing can stop us  
    From being together  
Measure my words by the night that's gone  
Always opening the door for you to come into this poem  
    With your smile and your body  
Through you I go from light to light  
    Flame to flame.  
It's through you I am able to speak  
    You are the center of it all  
Like a ray of sunlight that says yes to happiness  
But we still have to focus our eyes  
    In line with nights that human beings betray  
Who haven't found out how to be alive on earth.  
We have to take them into account  
    In order to save them  
We are going to start moving  
    From the sea bottoms and the mountains  
Along with fatheads that are too mean to live  
And birdbrains with crooked beaks  
Above just a brain case—below just a chin  
Bodies a prison for their bones  
Empty flesh eaten away by poisons  
By beauty by ugliness that no one rejects

One eye always blind a tongue that can't speak  
A hand that can't move a heart that can't beat  
Close to those who say just the right word and see far ahead  
Close by the eye that says everything and the hand that can do  
    anything  
Right next to a heartbeat that lays down the law  
The law of the dead leaf and the sail that folds up  
The law of the light turned out  
    And the kicks gone for good  
Calories that don't calorize  
    Love a boiled-out bone  
Snow turned to soot  
    And the folded-up wings  
    Of those too old to fly  
Over the fields  
    A tight little sky  
    Over tombs ploughed up by zeros  
At the turn of the road  
    The dogs wail  
    About a crazy kiss  
At the turn of the road  
    The spring dries up  
    And the fields break their teeth  
And the dogs are blowtorches  
    Licking up broken windows  
Over the fields a stench  
    Of black gangrene  
    Where the muscles give up  
The stars ugly pins  
    In a sky full of mold  
Go ahead think about men  
    Go ahead and make a baby  
Go ahead and cry or laugh  
    And get blotted up by the world

Work out your forms from formlessness  
Leave fingerprints in the rivers

Make sense out of nonsense  
In this hopeless world

But if we go up one degree

The day takes shape like an egg  
The played-out wind tells another story

Every victory is the same  
Every enemy a friend

Anemic friends and enemies  
Wounded even by zeros

Wrapping their bellyaches  
In yesterday's banners

Beautiful disappearing doves  
Dreaming their thoughts

They doll themselves up with hats  
A hundred times too big for their heads

They think about their absences  
And hide in their own shadows

Once upon a time they were present  
(between parentheses of course)

They have an idea they're little lion devils  
Great hunters of Negroes they think they see through  
Bursting in any place without a quiver

Clowns in dirty smocks

Glittering monsters and zebras that might have done worse

Anonymous daredevil bastards  
Making wisecracks out of their make-believes

And out of the high-water mark  
Of Herakleites' never-twice-stepping river

And the bitter homecoming  
To a wild animal refuge

Where the family honor is betrayed  
On the dry trough where a horse can't drink  
They think they believe but between us  
It would be better if they did believe  
If we go up one degree  
It's health and elegance  
In pink and black underdrawers  
Red hot and dead white  
Nothing dirty or dubious  
Just shells in the dark  
On a piano of the air  
Comfortable Cadillacs  
With wheels made of flowers  
It's the luxury of valises  
Piled carelessly into the ocean  
And the easy-says-it talk  
Digested like a nail in the wall  
Ideas that burst into jokes  
Desire in the pantry  
A tart a glass of wine a bit  
Of warmed over shit from yesterday  
If we go up one degree  
In this world without images  
Toward a cowboy's complaint  
So cold so bare  
Toward a willing hand  
Stretched out and spit on  
Toward a blind man who apologizes  
For stumbling against windows  
Toward the lonesome excuse  
Of a poor prick without excuses  
Toward the loud mouthed blah

Of victims cheering themselves up  
Weeks of weak-kneed Sundays  
That dribble into emptiness  
Hard workdays-off pissed away  
Sweaty hands that dry a man up  
The ethics of little ants  
Crawled over by still smaller ones  
If we go up one more degree  
Misery becomes eternal  
And cruelty gets fat as a house  
Wars immobilize themselves  
On pot-bellied glaciers  
The guerrilla fighting  
Dries up your flesh and blood  
What's left to calm the hearts of lovers?  
Or change the way their dreams are moving?  
Or to make you forget everything  
Even what it takes to change the law  
The law that makes your brain practical  
And lets you understand how to judge  
Errors according to errors  
If seeing were lightning  
In the land of dead bodies  
The judges would be God  
But there is no God  
If we go up one more degree  
Towards Ecstasy with no hangovers  
Paid for without the blues  
Or the choirs singing canticles  
Or brass bands playing military marches  
Or words that tie it up in a phrase  
With the cheers we love to hear

And the knock-out blows  
Of your animal pride  
And the shouting you can barely hear  
Of those who don't agree but play the game  
The keyhole of our locked selves  
Hides all our calculations  
I shiver like a tree  
At the passing seasons  
My pulsebeats are nothing but an excuse  
My blood is just another argument  
If we go up one degree  
My old friends my old self  
All have to confess  
Confess not just our despair but everything  
The vice of weaklings who can't sleep  
Confess not just our dreams  
(The best thing about strong men who get destroyed)  
But the broken image and the stupid wound  
Of the prophet without a body  
You accept and I accept our disease  
The same sweat drowns our suicide  
My old friends  
Old innocents and old guilty ones  
Trained to stand up against your loneliness  
Where our silly ideas light themselves up  
And our impatience accuses itself  
We are only alone when we are together  
Even our loves contradict themselves  
We insist on everything about nothing  
The exception itself has become ordinary—  
Our happiness too  
And our decadence



We wake ourselves up with our failures  
We don't hide how hard we are to understand  
We are brain children born out of chaos  
The one and only cloud stream of the abyss  
In the singing regions of the underworld  
Where we have joined together  
My old friends to be each by himself  
Stranger than ever  
If we go up one degree  
Over the girls with vine leaves in their hair  
A wreck drifts out to sea  
In the singing sun where I am heading  
Will I have a brother tomorrow  
Over the fresh ruins  
And wings of butterflies?  
The best thing about winter  
Is the earth making believe it's asleep.  
Without breastbeating or hating  
A beehive sticks together  
In a gooey hideaway  
It knows what's good for it  
Like a pitcher knows the touch of water  
And springs knows its buds  
And steel knows the flame of being born  
And gold gets burned in the cyclotrons  
Clouds get turned inside out  
Cliffs bend  
The waterfalls bounce back  
The make-believe image of a breast  
Handed over to monomaniacs  
But along with the breast nobody sucks  
Of the image everybody wins

The perfect touch of the austere kiss  
The darkened apple bough with the tree-ripe fruit  
The lovely body you find and love  
    Lit up like lace  
Where the fluorescence is a needle  
    The rain threads  
The left wing of your heart  
    Folds back on the heart  
I watch the fresh sweat  
    Burning on the morning grass  
Flower after flower  
    Being born in the sunrise  
Noon sleeps  
    But I cover it with hushes  
To celebrate this day  
    With its perfumes and lights  
I am not afraid of myself anymore.  
    I come from a woman  
The zeros of man and time  
    Have come to life  
The articulate answer  
To the tiniest stars  
And we go up higher  
The last argument of nothingness conquered  
Plus the last buzz of footsteps  
Walking back on themselves  
Step by step  
    The stuttering ABC's  
Of history and morality and grammar full of made-up memories  
Destroy themselves  
And quick as a spark  
    Liberty is conquered  
Liberty a leaf growing on May Day  
The five-star extra

The flame inside the cloud  
The fire in the bird's throat  
The light in the caves  
And everywhere men  
Taking over everything  
Including the walls  
Splitting up the bread  
Dividing the sun  
Kissing each other's cheeks  
Putting ribbons on the storms  
Kissing each other's hands  
Turning each body into a flower  
And time and space  
Make the padlocks sing  
And our lungs breathe  
Our eyelids are wide awake  
Everything hidden is revealed  
Our hunger laughs at tears  
And stupid sorrows  
At midnight the apples ripen  
At noon the moon shines  
All the zeros are filled up  
With rhythms that never stop  
And let's tell the truth  
Youth is a gold mine  
Old age is a gold mine  
The ocean is full of treasures  
The earth is waiting to be mined  
Winter is a fur to keep us warm  
Summer is a cool drink  
Autumn says hello with fresh milk  
As for spring it's just waking up  
Your mouth tastes of the morning sun  
Your eyes live forever putting everything in the right place  
The two of us you naked

Me everything I have become.  
You the root of our seed  
Me with hands open  
Like my eyes  
The two of us we live only to be  
Faithful to being alive

## Lines for an Early Mentor

K. SHADID HOSAIN

Darling, darling  
Upon the grimmer watches of the night,  
When pain has ebbed, and passion's memory  
Lies still, emasculated and serene,  
I think of you with ever-wondering joy  
And fresh bewilderment.  
Around your image in my memory  
Wheel all the myths and longings of my mind  
And all the desolation of my heart.  
You wrenched me from the vacancy of youth  
Into the purgatory of self-awareness,  
Into the world of longing and departure,  
Into the time of platitudes and poison,  
And in this semi-mutilated Eden  
You left me, with the pain of my awakening  
Drawing its darkness over every vision.  
Time has soon overtaken your dominion,  
But when the night relents,  
I will turn again,  
And with the freshening joy of new discovery  
Relive your sorcery and my betrayal.

## Editorial Notes

(continued from inside front cover)

Finally, I must add that while Mr. Angoff's professional reputation rests on his achievements as writer and editor, many, particularly his students, know him also as an inspired and inspiring teacher; among his intimates, he is regarded affectionately as ever the good companion and the giving friend.

For personal as for literary reasons, we are happy to be the publisher of Carl Sandburg's poem, "The Guitar," for it stirs memories of an evening more than thirty years ago in Funk's Grove on the Lincoln Road that runs from Springfield to Bloomington, Illinois. After a country dinner of chicken roasted on an old weight-propelled Breton spit before an open fire, we sat among the virgin pines and sugar maples as Sandburg sang America's folksongs, accompanying himself on his guitar. It was a moon-filled summer night, the woods alive with fireflies, the air vibrant with the tunes and words of peoples' songs. It seems inevitable, in retrospect, that Sandburg should write this tribute to Andrés Segovia, the greatest guitarist of our own and perhaps of all time, and that it should memorialize their mutual love for that "portable companion," that "chattel with a soul," which both artists, each in his own way, have generously shared over the years "with

few or many."

Edward Dahlberg's "agonizing reappraisal" of *Moby-Dick* will undoubtedly create a "stir" among the many Melville devotees. We publish it, in part, for this reason, for reappraisals seem to us always in order, particularly when they are done by a writer who has been called "the greatest English prose stylist since Robert Burton and Sir Thomas Browne." This is not to say that we espouse the Dahlberg thesis. We present it simply as engaging writing and challenging thinking, and we welcome letters of assent or dissent, a representative selection of which we hope to publish in a later number of *The Literary Review*.

It is widely assumed that there is a decline of interest specifically in poetry and, indeed, in the humanities as a whole, particularly among young people. Yet the Woodrow Wilson National Fellowship Foundation reports that it finds large numbers of outstanding young people interested in these fields, if only they can be identified and encouraged. "Of some twelve hundred students awarded Woodrow Wilson Fellowships for 1959-60, sixty-three mentioned in the required autobiographical statement that they wrote poetry, and a number of them had had some of their work published."

CLARENCE R. DECKER

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